JEWEL VENTURE

(chapters 0 (prologue) and 1 A)

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Jewel Venture 簡單的旅程

Prologue:

"Little one come and play and chase all the fluffy clouds away. Small meager one running into caverns you will never know how long you roam. Let your dreams carry you away, with that little treasured bell you love so well. Come and play in the haunting razor snow… for now that's all the life you will ever know."

"Once upon a time…" Once upon a time. That's how most stories go. And they like to end with "happy ever after". Every story of this world have such, different ways of expressing this... in their unique ways at unique places, at unique times. One culture, one identity… a melting pot of variants, infinite outcomes and possibilities both for the good... and the bad. Identity is a powerful thing indeed. It tears and builds, raises and crushes it's wielders… It is what raises the knife to someone's neck in betrayal and cuts the skin of the arm to painful and sorrowful burning scars. Though it also heals and makes layers, stronger and sturdier cement, a cement that can outlast the ages of history. A few ages past, in a world not… *too* different from our own. A boy was born, he resided on a planet half green and half water, half suffering and half prosperity... the planet of duality and perhaps paradoxicality: **Earth**.

Once just a normal world given inspiration, until a higher power seemed to give a gift… a white stream of wavey white light passing over like a comet over the beautiful misty blue... a new chapter in mankind's discovery, not of technology or weaponry, but of spiritual **power**. This spiritual white river was seen by all, and both feared and respected. For those who could harness it's potential, could achieve great power... the power to rule, the power to destroy, the power to control and manipulate others, though also the power to help and teach, and the power to nearly free mankind from the internal and external sufferings.

Once upon the great monsoon that passes through the dancing green grassy hills and the lush winding mountains, and across the old rice fields of small, homely towns. The tale of a boy would grow and become the symbol of the mandarin island country. But before, in the very beginning.. between the upper sea of East China and the Celebes waters.. the islands of the Philippines, the commercial island of Luzon. Tise island is where the thriving large city of Manila, stands, a mix of spanish and filipino culture, the actual capital of The Philippines, and where the steep and tall Mayon Volcano stands, the volcano's smoke always flowing out of its lid.

Far into the country, in a small woodland, trouble was brewing deep in jungle of Luxon, deep between Sayangan mountain range near the settlement Buguias, built like a formidable surrounding wall. Near a large village: New Euclid, a cold light gray medical facility stood tall, off putting and stark compared to the lively dark green woodland that surrounded it. It's long bright halls that induce, a calm yet lonely aura, as a lady with blonde ponytail and emerald green eyes, an white scientist gown and shuffling her square glasses (giving off an air of sophistication and experience) as she fast walks into the facility, quickly putting on her name tag: "Dr. Ellen Stuarts" as she rushed to through the door and down the grey dimly lit hallway.

The guard seemingly recognized her and didn't stop her, as her continued forward, moving past other doctors (both euclidean and human) to a man looking different vastly different from them, a man wearing grey cotton buttoned suit, his nametag covered by the bright light of the facility... a much older thin shouldered Caucasian man with thinning white and grey hair and a thin beard, tired with the skin around his orange mixed with pink reddish eyes, blacken wrinkled bags. He sees her and tells his nurse to care for his current patient, who has an elderly eucildean moving erratically and calling out for his son to save him. The doctor ignores the common screaming and irrational behavior he sees over and over at his job, and goes over to greet the famous writer, Ellen raising her hand to meet the even more famous biologist. "*You're late, Mrs. Stuarts! You missed our latest project… it a great creation, we have created another artificial lifeform, the 2.0 Azure Jr.! I know you are a famous book author, so I'm not surprise you have the need of neuroscience conventions every once in a while… but you missed yet another deadline, and another step for biology."*

"Lead Doctor, sir... why are we still so concerned about biology? Why not be concerned about the patients. We still need to maintain-"

"Yes, yes, move on with the ridiculous questions." The doctor looks at his watch and then looks back, going to Ellen and touching her elbow with his relaxed knuckles, gesturing to her to follow him. "*Anyway… the infant has proven to have a higher intelligence, a success. Though, the infant is... temperamental... maybe... a motherly figure could work to calm the specimen. Not imply you directly, I have many other things I need you to do before I can have you be a babysitter.*"

"*How about the other specimen, you're first? I heard he came back since it was his birthday and you...*"

"*WE... we don't talk about that specimen... it failed to meet expectations. Lack of intelligence, below a basic 80 IQ. This new subject, the 2.0 of that specimen is much less mutated and more streamlined to-*"

"I don't… I don't mean to be rude, sir. But he was your son, he's not just of scientific importance. He saw you as a father. You yourself called-"

"*Don' ask questions…"*

The doctor pointing his finger at Dr. Ellen, and lean forward with his head down, but keeping eye contact with her the whole time (seeing more of the bottom of his eyes, red vines popping)

"-About things you know nothing about, Apprentice Nurse Stuarts."

"But sir-"

*"It was a failure, that's all you need to know and *think* about the subject. Our staff here don't focus on the past... rather the future of mankind!*" Ellen walked with the doctor through the long dingy white halls with piercing fluorescent white light, making patients dazed feel like they're in heaven or hell. As they went through the interconnecting lonely halls, the medical doctor glancing at people passing by them with syringes with a blue liquid inside them, some the animal humanoid Euclideans scientists and many more human scientists… each greeting their boss as they passed. They carried their old weary patients to numbered rooms, the patients locked in place by straitjackets, trying to get out, one seeking the help of Ellen before Alken slaps the patient's hand and suggests the black cat male Euclidean doctor:

"Nurse Lionel, to put the subject on more carisoprodol and aspirin."

"*What are the syringes for?…*"

*"The…the syringes?… (*soft chuckle*) you know that answer already, Mrs. Stuarts. Didn't I just tell you not to be so curious? I need you to interview some patients for me, they're at rooms 910A and 916A… an old medic and a weapons ammunition guy, right... with a scar across his face. I want to know their mental states, if they are satisfied being here. If they resist, give them the drugs... that... our from our providers...our unstable patients, so they can relax and we can help them better, Got it?"*

"Yes... yes Dr. Ains."

"*Good. I'll be in my office if you need assistance.*" Ellen went down the long halls, but not to the doctor specified, but to a dark part of the facility. Shadows hanging off of every wall, dim light of doorways guiding her to her desired location. Finally, a room with a blue light. When she opened the door, immediately feeling the warmth coming off the light and hearing the whimpering of a small child. When she looked round, she saw a medical cradle with a small strange moon gray baby inside. The baby had large, cute eyes, a mix of red and grey irises, a rabbit humanoid appearance, with large ears, definitely unhuman. The baby seemed unaware of its cold and metallic surroundings, only the intimidating figure standing above it. She was mystified, unhuman alien creature, not native to this world… but… such innocence in a world filled with fear and corruption, she knew this was her target.

A camera caught her as she attempted to hold the baby and a blaring alarm went off. The baby was now crying from the noise, Ellen quickly getting the baby and ramming herself out of the doorway. While running, she tears off a white doctor coat and uses it as a blanket for the mysterious crying blue baby in her arms. Then tearing off the face mask she had been wearing the whole time, she wasn't neuroscientist Dr. Ellen at all, but a secret spy from an unknown party. Men in white medical gowns and mercenaries armed with rifles yell for her to "stop" or "hand the infant over". The agent rushes through the front double doors and hops on her motorcycle to the side and drives off. Through the flat land heading for the eastern edge of the island, though armed men on jeeps chase her for hours, villagers yelling in confusion and the baby crying profusely.

She has no time to comfort the baby with armed battle hungry men on her tail, and nearly was getting cornered on the mountain side road. But she was more clever than the lead doctor gave her credit for. She readied herself. They quickly pass over a road and the bulky vehicles fly over it, not noticing a parked motorcycle barely detectable in the deep ditch to the side. Once the coast was clear, she drove off, with the baby in her arms who was much more relaxed now, grabbing the air and giggling. She feels better that the baby was not making as much noise, as she passed through tall green tree woodland into the tropical palm trees that sat near soft ground of the shoreline.

A little white speedboat is situated partially on soggy sand, little waves created by the soft salty wind crashing on its back. Patches of deep dark blue surrounded by bright blue reflecting the light of the sunny sky. She hopped off the motorcycle with the baby and set a bomb under the steering wheel. She was practically running to the boat, hearing the vrooming of engines and grinding of wheels coming closer and closer to the shore. Their engines roared over the sound of angry soldiers hoping to the ground.

The agent tries her best to protect the baby, the soldiers shouting upsetting the baby greatly, making it start crying. The clouds get bigger and darker, and waves starting to get bigger and more violent. As the final truck with a bunch of scientists and the lead doctor who "Dr. Ellen" talked to earlier. He got out of the truck and was yelling for them to snatch the creature out of her hands… **any means necessary**. The battle starved soldiers hoped off the truck and surrounded the two, one of them closes in to grab the baby. The wind got louder and louder… "This baby is not your property, ma'am! It belongs to the New Euclid hospital, now give it to me slowly... and calmly."

She looks back behind her, with the ocean touching the back of her ankles, and a the army from the pits of the dark places of the world in front. She was trapped and felt alone. She looked into the sky for answers, knowing she may not find any… the cool breeze touching her face, closing her eyes to feel it the cool wet breeze… the ocean comforting her and inviting. The soldier who claimed to not resort to violence was getting impatient, she made her prey short, and looked back to the soldier… a determination she rarely felt before in her line of work.

"I... I can't. He's no longer your responsibility."

"Gave us the baby NOW. No excuses. This is a government order, ma'am!"

One of the foreign mercenaries in the back, young and grinning with a hot-headed energy... walks up and tries to snatch the baby himself. Pulling on it's arm, the spy trying to stop him screaming "no!". The other soldier who never was faced real opposition, got more desperate, which made he more violent... pulling the baby's arm hard and breaking one of the baby's elbow joints. The spy screamed in rage and punched him square in the face, and yelled for him to stay down. The youth refused, and jumping back up and tackled the lady, tackling her and putting his barely experienced hands around her neck. He is overwhelmed by his power, by his need of manliness... however his actions prove he knows nothing of it.

The crying of the baby grew as the wind became deafening, as tall clouds circled... twisting and spinning. Angry primal sound of thunder banged loudly against the heavens and the earth. Then out of the blue… a stray current of deadly natural electricity shot down from the sky and zigzag its way to the ground. In milliseconds, the soldier could only jump back... but it still met it's target... the soldier was burnt to cinder. The evil not seen by ones who fight against others in wars they never needed join, now life taken... now gone, following the commands of a non-battle harden fool, gone and forgotten without a child, a wife, a mother... a soul to even mourn them. The price for obedience to one who does not value you. With the commotion caused by this turn of events, the agent uses it as a distraction to leave on the motorboat. With the baby lost perhaps forever, the soldiers and scientists leave… except for the lead doctor who watches the motorboat, and storm gradually following the boat from behind. The wind blowing his name tag off his purple coat which read: "Executive Manager - Dr. Alken "Jackel" Ains".

The storm picked up quickly over what used to be mild waves. Water crashed around the boat, the crushing waves and loud wind swirling it in circles. The baby started crying again, and so the agent sings it a lullaby (A la Clair Fontaine), the baby soon closes its eyes and drifts off to a dreamland while the agent stayed awake to shield the infant from the monstrous waves of the hellish storm. For days crossing the Chinese pacific, she is forced to close the sails and throw water with a bucket out of the ship as large waves, some being typhoons, almost make the ship go under; though by some miracle, the ship didn't get shallowed up. She was got water behind her ear with how much water rained down on her, realizing she should of bought a second pair of clothes as well. Every day that the storms stopped, she would ration out her food: comprising of blueberries, beef jerky, graham crackers, marshmallow creme, hershey bars, salted meat, sauerkraut, and several bottles of triple-berry vitamin water (she supplied and bought everything herself, the ship was provided by her superiors). While the baby had mashed sweet potato, banana, avocado, and some baby milk stored in the back of the ship.

Two days in, it was only cloudy, and no waves came in; feeling a lot better, and no longer sick from the cold... the agent decided to make some s'mores. The reason being to show the kid for the first time something good and nice, and the domain of the ambitious… not the dark, humorless, lifeless and soulless metallic nature of that so called hospital. She thought it was worse that he didn't even get to meet the kind and simple focused country folk before having destiny crafted by the doctor forced upon him. Since it was too wet to make a fire, and the ship didn't have any wood, she just put an unmelted hershey's, with some graham and marshmallow together and ate it, giving the baby small pieces of her own s'more on that calm day. The baby grin and giggled in satisfaction, then suddenly burping after a few bites... making a usually tense spy, which she is used to being... for yet another time, caught completely off-guard. But she laughed and did not feel like a bad thing for the first time in many years.

A few weeks later, the two were still at sea. The one week's worth of rations which was supposed to last for several weeks was now gone. She cuddle with the baby and use the spare food in her pockets which is all she had left…Like the baby even had birth mother, it was born an orphan. Though, for a very unusual lady like herself, who has assassinated hundreds of political figures and murdered people in cold blood for the motherland, she couldn't help but smile like a parent as she held the infant closer to her chest as the sea pushed the boat up and down through raging waves and wrathful fast winds, and loud thunder and pouring salty rain.

They landed on land several days later, the agent's clothes dirty and smelly with a salty stretch from weeks out at sea. The boat landed on the beach, the great long green mountains, clean air and wind showing the spy that they were finally at a place she preferred and liked. Taiwan, The Island of Rolling Green, Island of The Founders of Ki. Though the tiresome smell of salt from the sea water is still there, she was glad. She stepped out of the boat and grabbed her backpack... putting the baby inside with his little head peeking out. She carried the baby in a worn backpack left in the boat, which because it wasn't tied down... was dragged back into the ocean, just like intended. She followed a small dirt road to one of the main interstates that travels through the south of Taiwan. She taking a small woven wood cradle, and makeshifts into a small motorboat and puts it on a metal attachment and places on her back, carrying the worn backpack with the baby in her arms; just in case for a situation where she was about to be captured by local guards and she make a safety getaway for the baby for it won't be taken.

A little later she gets to the township of Hengchun ("hun-chun"), a old small town with a few shops, apartments, and a small middle school, though much more decorated and colorful than where the spy came through, a stone built of ancient gray stonework walls and bridges. and moss growing everywhere. She went to all the houses around the block and further ahead, but they all closed the door on her as soon as they saw the baby's face "a freak! That alien abomination! I don't want a child of murderers mingling with my children!". Not finding anyone who could accept, the heat making her feel like making she feel like she still out in the empty ocean. She heard from a teacher looking after a bunch of kids in front of the middle school, that there was a house outside of town to the north. When she got there, she saw a small two story wooden, white-washed house on a tiny incline near a large rice field, with many bushes and little red buds covering the entire way to the house, a little front yard with brushes sparsely separated with a tiny metal fence separating the worn-down concrete walkway connecting to the oddly slightly wider highway road that goes through the entire town. Small, cozy... this was just right, all she needed was to find the owner, holding on courage knowing she may be told to leave again.

Though when she went to the door, there was a yellow thin sticky note made in harsh blue print writing of old mandarin, obviously written with a long worn out pen, stuck to the wood door with an metal rim by a pin:

"OUT FOR A BIT, GOING FISHING ON THE LAKE. I'LL BE HOME BY FIVE, I BE READY FOR ANY BUSINESS BY THEN"

Knowing she has little time, she asks an old taiwanse rice farmer who was working nearby on a watery rice bed, planting, with his own home in the distance: "*Do you know where your neighbor, in this house is? Somewhere at a lake, perhaps? That's what the note on his door said.*" The old man was wearing a

long straw hat and oddly tropical looking clothing, long gloves in the water, straw sandals even though his feet were in muddy water, and a hawaiian shirt. The farmer looked to her with aged eyes, and an old man's gentle smile. The agent almost distracted by the smell of the acidic spice of kimchi mixed with carrots and pickle flowed through the smell of wet plants and mud of the rice fields, in the little cozy cottage, big enough for a family, and small enough to keep it's humble disposition.
likely the old man's home. *"Lake? Oh... you searching for fool Choro Gang's student? Haha! He's always fishing, never working. The lake is called: Longluan Lake ("long-lawn")... it's north from here. Keep your head on the road, go through the north gate of the town, go past Binlang ("ping-long") Rd, and you'll find it. Though... I would warn you fine girl... It's wise not to disturb fool Adam, or else you'll get a kick to the face."*

Him pointing to his face, pulling him his wide straw hat that covered everything except his mouth and chin. She could clearly see his right eye was bruised and blacken…

"But I can get him for you- 😏"

The old rice farmer starts whispering, covering one side of his mouth with his hand, and grinning with an old laboring man's charm. "*...I know how to push the boy's buttons.*" "*No need, thank you sir.*"

"*Very welcome..."* When the agent is far enough away, the old farmer takes another look at the lady, giving a shit-eating grin and softly giggling before going back to work, making sure that his wife wasn't nearby. *"ha... very welcome indeed... big breast blondie*." Yet, he still felt the sting of a angry wife's sharp nail on his old ear all the same.

The baby rests softly in her arms, finally sleeping after the day's long search to find the baby a home. She just like on the ship, felt like a mother holding the little alien creature in her arms. But she could not ignore her mission, she couldn't take in the baby, that will compromise her but also put him in danger as well.

She quickly headed toward the lake which there were a few of guards with strange high-class military weapons on them, patrolling around the town. She tries to hide but the guards quickly see her, knowing she looks pretty damn suspicious in her waterlogged russian spy looking clothing. She quickly took ran to the lake and took off the cradle makeshift toy motorboat off her back, and places it in the water. The guards gets closer and start shouting for her to get on her knees and raise her arms in the air, the agent turns on the initiation of the little engine and puts the baby in. She lets go of the boat and the boat splashes away as the guards tackle her and put her in cuffs, she gives a final sadden look to the little baby and follows the guards. Holding arms close to her chest, never forgetting the little angel…

A warm breeze blew over across blades of green grass near the small lake which stood strangely flat next to the bumpy dark green mountains and power lines jumping to each mountain. There was barely a cloud in slight in the endless blue as the lone boat floated about on the fresh water. An caucasian man wearing a buttoned up blue shirt, dark blue jeans and had the Saikō Party flag on his cap, strains of brown hair coming out. His bucket of worms by one side, and an orange inhaler to the sitting by the side of his left

hip on the wood elevated plank; putting a leg over the edge of the boat, and his leg over that one, A piece of straw and a rusty nail clinched on his teeth. He had his fishing pole out, and a bucket of fish bait that he already used to catch a few fishes with the bait on the far north eastside of the murky still water of Longluan Lake. To his side is already two taiwanese mahseers and a couple of carp, seeming to be planning to catch more.

He suddenly heard a baby crying in the distance, which he peered over his little boat to see what it was. A weird little watercraft was being pushed through the water by propellers, with a little white banket that had a seemingly blue greyish creature inside it. Adam put one and two together, and quickly rowed the boat towards that direction, and after getting to the boat, he pulled it out of the water. The propellers were still on, and Adam quickly tried to find an off switch, but eventually took the baby out and put the craft back into the water, sending it off on its own untold adventure. He now saw that the creature was a baby, kind of like a human baby, but obviously different; the surprise almost made him fall off the boat, but he manage to settle himself, and stared at the weird gray rabbit humanoid creature. The baby was still upset and crying loudly, but Adam didn't know what to do and in his panic nearly dropped the baby... making it cry even louder. Panicking he stared and held the baby to the sky, yelling for someone to take him back, the very heavens to take him back. Now the baby was just confused... But... nothing... of course. why the heck would he think he could get out of this so easily?

He couldn’t take care of a baby! His work life was so demanding, and he was a man! Not a mother… he didn’t had that gentle touch, he was too rough, too skilled in his harsh trades. But… when he though a mother… it reminded him of his relationship with his Austrian mother. And seeing the baby, it reminded him of something incredibly precious to him… a song his mother would sing to him on his old wooden frame bed when he was very young. I gave him hope and comfort the darkest points of his life... and, he knew what to do. He held the baby close, and breathed deeply…

"Sleep, my baby, sleep, love, Two rosy cheeks to reap, love! Into dreamland glide while I Sing to thee thy lullaby, Sleep, my baby, sleep, love!... Like a flower expanding, Methinks I see thee standing, Strong in growth and sweet and fair, Drinking God's pure, sunny air, Like a flower expanding..."

The baby instead of crying, started enjoying the song. Adam having an overwhelming feeling inside him, like a feeling of a father... or even motherly figure... he made him feel how his mother sang to him. Maybe his mother felt the same way... the baby started laughing happily, and almost in instinct, Adam put the baby on his lap and played with it, touching it's nose goofily and made silly faces as he continue his mother's lullaby:

"...Don't forget your home, love, When far away you roam, love! Growing from your Mother's... Father's care, Don't forget to say your prayer; Don't forget your home, love!... Roses, red and glowing, Among the thorns are growing, All the thorns I keep for me, All the roses are for thee. Roses, red and glowing... From thy cozy nest, love, Unto thy Father's arms. Come, my babe, and take thy place, Father's lap and fond embrace Make thy safest nest, love!”.

The song was called: “Sov mit barn, sov længe" (Sleep, My Baby, Sleep, Love). Though, he did replace a few words: like mother with father, and breast with arms. As Adam sings his lullaby, the baby goes from

crying, to being drowsy, to finally sleeping. A big smile comes across Adam face and puts the baby gently on his lap. He grabs the boat paddles and rows to back into the west shore of the lake, where he chained his boat with iron chains, a lock, and a very large heavy rock, and walked across Xitan Road, until there was a clearing of farmland, one little road that led to a little house that was covered by a wild looking tree at a certain angle. This was Adam's home, and now, the baby's as well.

"Sleep, my baby, sleep, love, Two rosy cheeks to reap, love! Into dreamland glide while I Sing to thee thy lullaby, Sleep, my baby, sleep, love!... Like a flower expanding, Methinks I see thee standing, Strong in growth and sweet and fair, Drinking God's pure, sunny air, Like a flower expanding... Don't forget your home, love, When far away you roam, love! Growing from your father's care, Don't forget to say your prayer; Don't forget your home, love!... Roses, red and glowing, Among the thorns are growing, All the thorns I keep for me, All the roses are for thee. Roses, red and glowing... From thy cozy nest, love, Unto thy father's arms love, Come, my babe, and take thy place, Father's lap and fond embrace, Make thy safest nest, love!". '

Across the sea, many months later, the agent makes it back to Paris, Capital Royal Province of France, capital city and military headquarters of the south and middle Europe union: Novus Ordo. She is driven by limousine across the french prairie land filled with simple folk mind their business, the hard day's labor and it's hardships and great joys. Then across the main city, starving and mad, loud and ones who poke at every beast, and ones who have nailed their ears shut. Wild protests, of people yelling and screaming, banging across the limousine window, somehow assuming whoever was inside was responsible for their daily troubles. The limousine kept going, moving past the downtown and into the more quiet outer edge, the city meeting with the outer country. The shining black car parked, and it's valuable asset walked out, now in front of a large Victorian though still indiscrete mansion. She enters through the guarded gate, who goes into the large wood doors. She goes through the large dark empty lobby and up the creaking stairs, enters the main room. The agent closes the door and speaks to a large shadow on the other side of the room, barely lit up by the night sky through it's large slender windows, lights glowing through the city surrounding the tall Eiffel tower. "*Andrei Zielińska, reporting to Minister of Novus Ordo that transport of target Azure Blue has been completed. The experiment has been taken from Dr. Alken and transferred to a desired location.*"

"*Desired?...*" The man spoke up, with an elderly raspy voice, though still strong and quiet, though so loud that it would feel like he was talking into the agent's ear. *"I couldn't make it to the motherland on plane sir, the lead doctor's guards cut me off. But I managed to use the secondary escape, the boat, to get off the island. And I got away from the Philippines and went to the next nearest land I thought he wouldn't..."*

The silhouette slowly stands up, now showing he is a towering and large shoulder shadowy stature, with restraints keeping his hands locked together and covered up in thick iron, only his old eyes are visible. *"Taiwan, it was Taiwan, wasn't it?"*

"Ye-yes... yes sir. How did you know, sir?"

"It's the martial arts capital of the world now... so my rivals and foes claim and have claimed. They seek to supplant me with a powerful warrior, though they fear the masked emperor who dwells there. Plus, you always had an affinity for martial domination."

"Thank sir, boss."

"Do you know where was the baby taken? Who did you give it to?"

"A fisherman, on a large lake near the township of Hengchun. Very laydown place, very traditional."

*"It will take a while before Alken figures out the child is there; it would be wise to keep few insiders among the main police force and locals to keep us updated on anything Alken or his scientist or *mercenary* goons are up to in the area."*

"Umm... I don't think that will happen." The man stooped forward, seemingly offended by the agent's choice of words. The agent notices and thinks about it, but is sure of herself and continues: *"Alken won't go looking for the child... he has... other plans in mind..."*

"What other plans?"

Suddenly intro of the series plays, with pacific guitar Chinese pop music playing, played up like the intro to Hawaii in Lilo and Snitch (Sorry, this isn't part of the story, just would really like this to happen, I love that movie).

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TIME DURATION:

Xiao-lan's adventure time around: Zero days and weeks

Time of events: In random order, unorganized time.

****

Jewel Venture 簡單的旅程 (Jiǎndān de lǚchéng) (shen-den-dah lee-chun)

Chapter One A: The Daily Grind

The large important building disappears as we leave the lite up beautiful city of Paris, and past the vast european lands and cross the great countryside of the west and east, past the provinces of China, and over the pacific sea, back to the thriving and beauty island country of Taiwan. Pacific guitar chinese pop music playing, travel through busy city of Old and New Taipei, past the golden buddha statue in the biggest

Buddhist temple in Taiwan, all the way through the Pengchu market and back to Hengchun, the world aging now, as eleven years seem to fly by.

Now passing through the green hills woody areas of the Pingtung county, in southern smalltown Taiwan, going through the west gate fort of Hengchun, made of ancient moldy reddish brick stone (Hengchun meaning: constantly spring, pronounce: hun-chun), surrounding the entire small town areas and then woodland, and farmland divided into parts that form the large township of Hengchun, Pingtung County (South Taiwan). The buildings are mostly an old pale gray or white, the building seem aged and from a different time, each having signs more colorful and different to attract visitors, all being completely open shops you could just walk into and buy. Though, At a rare indoor shop, a tall high schooler tries to finish his plate of soupy dumplings, and rushes back on his motorcycle and the rest of his street gang do the same, not even paying the check for the small shop owner lady, riding off on their colorful motorcycles down the slim streets of Hengchun. Now leaving town as the motorcycle gang pass laughing at their crime, passing by Adam's home, now bigger and newer looking, a vibrant painted log cabin home of red and white. In the upper second floor window, there is then 10 year old Xiao-lan's room, clean with covered with action figure robots, and posters of K-pop singers (including BTS) and more local chinese singers, plus a giant shirtless old man with a english lettering: "Fortis, The Superhuman. France's No. 1 Superhero". On his desk, an old bootleg samsung, and a busted up laptop that hadn't been cleaned since he got it for his tenth birthday. He is sleeping now, wearing his favorite superhero: Forest Knight, pajamas, under his poke-a-dot blue and red blanket; stuck in a half good and half horrifying nightmare.

Xiao-lan's eyes open and close constantly, as two doctors seemingly do surgery on his body. He didn't feel anything happening, but then… he can hear a slightly high but darkly calm male voice talking to other man on the progress of the operation in the distance, and two shadowy figures being pulled into another room, a younger girl forcibly taken to around room while she screamed for her parents. Then before Xiao lan could see where the daughter was taken, red starting to cover his eyes, the calm chilling voice became deafeningly loud, but as soon as the dream came, he woke up. A weird dream he thought, being in space and then seemingly being operated on.

It was morning, and he can smell of steam from boiling water and water rice, with eggs being cooked, it was his father: Dart-Adam, he is known in least at the house, as the best scrambled eggs cook in all the land. The small gray rabbit with his short, straight, and overly combed black hair and big eyes quickly takes off his pajama and puts on his school clothes, which are old jeans and a long white dress shirt, then following the smell to downstairs and into the chinese wood cabin kitchen. There are some pictured symbols of yin and yang across the room, and the jade statues of the twelve lucky animals of the Chinese Zodiac on a small fireplace near the stairs, serving as Adam's luck charms. His father wearing a more amish look with pull-up pants and a dark blue button shirt, however, instead of his old fisher hat when he was a bum, he wears his farmer and gardener straw hat, growing a brown fully beard. He looks to Xiao-lan, with almost a open mouth and childish glee in his eyes, as he prepares the oolong herbs he got from his farmer friend in the mountains. Xiao lan at the down of the stairs looks to him and exclaims:

"***你好（Nǐ hǎo), Dad!***" (nǐ hǎo ("neigh-how") (English Trans: Hello))

"***Good morning to you too, Xiao lan... I made a good batch of eggs to get you stuffed up before heading off to school.***"

"***You know you can just make some rice, the egg on is just yucky.***"

"***Oh come on, you know you like it!***" "*Yeah I do...*" Xiao lan said quietly. While Adam is going off to get the boiling brown oolong tea on the stove, the adopted son freely showing his appearance looks to see if Adam left the room and takes out his secret sriracha ketchup bottle that he got from one of his friends yesterday and puts a heck ton on his egg. Adam returns and sighs, as he goes over the neatly decorated wood table where Xiao lan is sitting, depictions of flowers with snake-like dragons flying around them, pouring the mountain oolong tea from a chinese clay teapot into a mini china teacup. He taking a firm seat on his favorite chair on the other side of the table, him fitting nicely on it, feet on the floor, while Xiao lan's tiny legs are hanging from the chair. Readily sitting waiting for the moment to eat, though having to wait for Adam to finally pouring his cup and getting his meal ready, holding the bottom of the cup with both of his hands like a monk, and drinking the warm tangy tea. "***You know... I had a really weird dream...***"

"***Tell me more.***" Adam getting up with his meal and moving his chair to the other side of the table, to sit in-front of the young spry hare with ears far over his head curving down, the bowl hitting the wood table with a small chatter; then putting his elbows on the table and putting his head on his hands. The bluish bunny boy looking at him in a way one would respond to a question by a prying 40s to 60s councilor.

"***I was in space at first, on a gloomy barren grey moon, something that looked like from the future in that really old terminator movie, but it was all purple and dark metal, and their people like me who were in chains...***"

"***The first one? Did you watch that with your friends?***"

"***Timmy's mom had it.***"

"***Sounds interesting... go on.***"

"***And then I saw a baby version of myself being carried away by a blonde lady across the sea to here, then you finding me, and singing your lullaby. Which kind of sucks, since… I didn't have a cool ending to that dream. Like snow falling, snowflakes like diamonds falling on me as I carried a princess in my arms-***" Adam Dart chuckles to himself hearing this. ***"What?"*** Adam still chuckling, leaning back in his chair and taking a sip of his tea, dramatically putting it down, gasping with thirst now relieved. "***Ahh I remember you as a baby, the lake gifting you to me. You remember your favorite lullaby, huh. Because you mentioned it, I feel like singing-***"

"***NO! no... I'm fine not doing that. I just want to (*snort*)-"*** Xiao-lan nearly spilling his food from his mouth. *"I just want to eat.*" Adam scooching his upper body forward, with a cheeky smile on his face.

"Ok little sir… but before that… you know what we have to do first."

“Ughh…”

"Come closer son." Putting his strong working hand with on Xiao-lan's shoulder with a gentle movement but a strong fatherly grasp, and he begins his morning prey. Adam breathing in and out… his face now completely stoic, no silliness.

"***I thank the lord for giving us this wonderful feast, and hope to keep having good harvest for the rest of this year and good health. I pray to the lord and the spirits of my grandfather and grandmother, and my *mother* and father, for divine spiritual protection, blessings for me and my son...***

I pray that my son will get to his school safely, and that no dangers will harm his body and soul. I pray that he makes new friends and grows his relationship with his *current* friends....

now give your prayer, son."

"Ok... I pray... *I* pray that my dad has a better harvest this year. So I don’t eat rotten cabbage again."

“Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses…” Adam became quiet for a second and then resumed.

“***Amen*.**”

"Amen." After that Xiao-lan sternly flops back onto his seat hard and starts stuffing his face full with ketchup egg rice. "***Boy, you know how unhealthy that is.***" Xiao lan looks up with a bunch of tomato paste on his cheeks, his mouth completely full. ***"(*muffled*) I like ketchup on my egg, it's the only way I can eat it.***"

"***You gotta swallow it, son. You are not going to talk with a full mouth in this household. Plus, that much sriracha is going to burn your tongue.***" Xiao-lan just looks to his adoptive father, and looks to his food, shyly responding: ***"(*swallows*) yes dad.***"

Adam sighed and started to eat his own rice and egg with no absurd amount of ketchup, then he remembers something, puts down the fork and goes to the fridge; taking out a glass jar with an English word above mandarin which meant the same thing: "Kraut", and puts it with his rice, mixing it in. Xiao-lan looks to his adoptive father’s meal with most of his vision taken up by his bowl he’s cowing down on. Shallowing and burping, he rubs off the food remnants off his mouth with his wrist, looking to his father figure with gleeful curiosity. ***“Dadddd!...”***

Adam looks up from swirling the sourful kraut into his rice and looks up without moving his head.

"(*sigh*)... i'm right here, boy. You don't need to call me out like that."

“ I was taught in school you only put ketchup on eggs or soy sauce... Why do you always put fermented cabbage?..."

"***Because I like it...***" Adam made a snarky silly face as he said it, reaching out and tapping the side of his fork on Xiao-lan's left knuckle. "***But why do you get mad at me for putting ketchup on rice...?***"

"Cabbage is healthy for you, ketchup isn't." Adam looking down at his hands, looking at his age skin and worn knuckles, turning over and looking at his palms... grasping and putting one of his hands on his wrists, a look of subtle frown on the tip edges of his lips, nearly hidden in the worker man’s almost always calm, friendly and unconflicted face. ***"And… and it reminds me of my old life."***

"Do you miss being in Hungary?... some of my friends came from Eastern Europe, and they kind of miss it too."

"Hah... you mean Tóth brothers?... Haha... those two are great... (*laughing louder*) they are good friends, you should keep them close." Adam dives in to take another bit of his food, putting a big chunk of it into his mouth and chewing... and then swallowing, his eyes closed a little.

"That didn't answer my question, Dad."

Adam seemed to close his arms inward and start chugging the tea he made into his mouth rather than normally sipping it. Then throwing it in the sink behind him, a break of porcelain heard which startled the boy but Adam didn’t react, used to loud noises.

"Yeah yeah... I do miss it sometimes... I miss going cloud-watching with your grandmom and playing flute in my band. But... I came here for a reason, to relax... and plus I have you with me, I can relive my early life with you, son. You are all I need. You are all I need. Wherever you are, here or the North pole or the bottom one. No matter where... That will be my home.”

"But do you miss grandma?..." Adam stops eating, throwing his spoon down and using a napkin to clean his mouth and the back clean side to wipe his forehead. Moving and bending his shoulders around to get uncomfortable energy out of his system. Then looking back to Xiao-lan, some conflict on his face.***"Xiao-lan, you should finish your meal and get to school. You are almost running late."***

Xiao-lan stopped asking questions there, as he forgot he was going to be late if he stayed there any longer, so he ate the rest of his food quickly like a cartoon character, shallowed, and said his goodbyes. Quickly, he gets his backpack on and opens the front door, making sure his socks are on straight as he ties his shoes, then putting his drab cotton black jacket with light gray sleeves, matching his skin making him seem invisible in public, hiding and stuffing his ears under his black hoodie, then once ready, he rushes putting his hands in his jacket's pockets, going into the warm, bright and cloudless outside of his house. Adam looking on from his chair, looking on with a proud smile, though he looks down to his hand and for a second, a chill suddenly running down his spine. However, he collects himself, savoring his breakfast

before going back to water the backyard vegetable garden (sweet potato, cucumber, bok choy, and avocado), then he would be off to work.

Xiao-lan quickly rushing over the creaky wooden planks of the balcony going pass the sign that states the residence of Xiao-lan's home in painted mandarin: "*Dart Family, Dart-Adam*". He quickly passes that old rice field, which did not had that delicious smell from his dream, since the wife the old man: Pinyin, never cooked until supper (the old farmer used to going to the small open dumpling shop near his part-time janitor job, for breakfast and lunch). Leaving the very edge of the Kenting woodland and entering the small little areas named by their streets, kind of like most suburbs in the United Republic. Xiao-lan did his usual walk along the long thin Xitan road, passing rice fields and two family shrines, one being a shrine dedicated to a known martial artist his father mentioned: Gang-Choro (English ver- Choro Gang), Sifu of The Crane Dojo, Adam's personal mixed kung-fu and other martial arts teacher someone who Xiao-lan's guardian looked up to very much.

Then passing the tropical trees mixed with wild midland woodland, he passes a old worn, though still running motorcycle club pub where only old folks go; marking the intersection of Caoton Rd and Xitan Rd. A few of them are relaxing and drinking taiwanese variant of beer, one being too young so he drinks a canada dry; and two older cranky folk playing a old game of: mahjong, the one balding with no facial hair clearly one, and the hairy one very obvious upset at the lose. Xiao-lan continue walking down that road to the south, passing by the Laun Cheng Library, which had his preschooling, kindergarten, and his homeschooling by Adam for four years before having to go to the current school he was going to, the one nearer downtown Hengchun. Crossing a few more roads, with long stretches of green and old worn down buildings, and rice fields, traveling the quarter of the lake's distance.

He gets on Nanguage road, already 40 minutes into the walk, and against his own father's wishes, going to the bigger and more commercial area of Hengchun with a few cars and lots of people with motorcycles. The street was filled with busy moms driving their kids to school, and teens getting their first spin on on a motorcycle, either to small street shops for clothing, electronics, or food, driving to the bigger cities less than 2 hours away. Xiao-lan walks past them while jaywalking to get across Nanwan rd, humming, to his school: Nanwan Hengchun Middle School, meeting his friends at the stepway leading to the dim entrance. An confident grinning boy with frizzy european-hair, chubby cheeks, and arms, and his much skinner, almost too the bones brother with combed hair and strange red freckles round his face that Xiao-lan never seen other than on Walt. Some both taiwanese and ultra famous korean celebrities on the walls, some kids put up to advertise their fan clubs; as well as an old poster of famous chinese songwriter Jono Leely about his song he made with Superband: "Desperado", and a poster of "Awakening" by Sarah Chen. Xiao-lan raises a hand and slaps Timmy's hand and they hold their young fists together in a arm lock like how they saw Arnold Würstechen and Carl Weathers from that Prey and Predator 80s movie they got a few years back and watched together at Adam’s home when he wasn’t home. Then Timmy grabbed and pulled out one of Xiao-lan's rounded ears from his hoodie and started tugging it.

"***Hey bun-man, how's it going?***" Xiao-lan’s face goes into complete terror as he looks behind him and around to see anyone looking. Then seeing no one, sighs with relief and stares daggers at Tim.

"***Dude stop it!***" Xiao-lan ripping his ears away from Timmy's grasp, quickly shoving it back up his hoodie quickly as he hears footsteps about to pass-by from his side. "***That's not going to be your thing now, right?... It better not.***" The hooded almost emo kid goes through nervous laughter after hearing Timmy nonsense, trying to hide his obvious irritation. ***"Because I'm going to punch you if you say that again, jerk.***" Timmy just looks blankly at Xiao-lan and rubs his nose in confusion and itches his neck a bit. "***Cool down, bun-man.***"

Xiao-lan winds up and punches Timmy in the shoulder aggressively and then makes his way into the school, Timmy rushes and trying to say sorry through his wise guy personality; while Walt rolls his eyes as he spins his wheels as he listens to the usual Xiao-lan and Timmy banter. Timmy was wearing a light blue shirt and light pale brown jeans, and Walt was wearing a light-yellow shirt and glasses, with worn blue jeans, which both wear all the time. Timmy also had eight colored beaded bracelets from colors of green, pink, black, light blue and sky blue to white, which were on his right arm, and three bracelets on his other arms two being wooden oak brown and one being a royal red. The bracelets were made from a girl arts and crafts club from Timmy elementary school, where the girls made bracelets with the names of the Eight Immortals on one arm, and the three Taoist luck gods on the other, craved into them in old mandarin.

"***I got the history of the Dutch and Japanese periods of Taiwan essay assignment done; you guys worked on it? Oh, who am I kidding? Walt definitely did it, but you probably just took his homework.***"

"***Wow... you really think that little of me...***" Timmy tilts his head back and does an "ahh" sound with his mouth in a dramatic way. Then he started talking in a sort of crappy version of Shakespeare's type of "lyrical speaking". "...***Do I mean nothing to thee?***"

"***Did you then?***" Xiao-lan questions with one of his eyes slightly closed and the other wide open, leaning in with his arms crossed.

".....no... :("

He sighs from Timmy's predictability, and reshifts his backpack forward on his shoulders. "***Thought so, we don't got time, history class is about to start. Come on!***"

"***What's your rush, man? It's only history. Like-we already heard about it 3 different times.***"

"And we are likely to hear it ten more times throughout our thrilling academic lives until 18." Walt stating matter of fact, pointing his finger up.

"That freaking sucks."

"Says the most bullied person in school." Walt mumbling with his head turned away to try to dispel what he said anywhere but toward Xiao-lan.

The trio heads to their first class: Taiwanese and Chinese History/Mandarin History. They go to class, a white room filled with some posters mix of mandarin writing and english, since it was class with english and mandarin lessons. The teacher Mrs. Lilly Shen, with her square glasses and stout square-like body, with buttoned shirt and pale blue and white line pattern dress shirt. She looks across the room and then writes on the clipboard, Xiao-lan quickly zooming to his seat and sitting at his desk with an awkward panicked smile, while Timmy fast walks to his desk scratching his back. Timmy takes a seat and then looks at the teacher to see if she even notices him coming in, which assumes likely not... Xiao-lan looks around nervously before Timmy hits his shoulder and mouths off words with no sound, but you know what he said was: ("*Why you so panicked?*") And then Xiao-lan moves his lips with no sound making hand gestures to make his point: ("*There was a test, I don't know how I did*.") Somehow the chubby over-socialized kid understands and tilted his back and shook his head with his eyes closed, waving like he was slapping a rotten smell away from him ("*You'll be fine, you worry too much*").

"*Are you two done reenacting a bad play or are you going to keep *messing around*?!*"

The teacher announced loudly, looking to Xiao-lin and Tim. Hitting the wooden ruler on her other hand hard, a disciplinary look given.

Both of them immediately shift back into their seats, putting their arms on the desk and facing their bodies forward. "***Alright then, I think everyone is here... Alrighty then! As you may have known, there was a test on Friday, and the good news is most of you past! Even the more... lazier kids.***"
The teacher looked directly at Timmy when she said that Walt almost bursting out with laughter, but since Walt has an adult's level of self-control, he keeps quiet. The teacher looked to Xiao-lan, though her stare is more threatening... staring daggers at Xiao-lan, before sighing and rolling her eyes as she continues her lesson, writing about the current topic of the unit on the whiteboard with blue marker and red marker.
"***You'll get your test with your grades at the end of class, right now we'll go to our next unit, the History of Taiwan of going from the main socialistic democratic to a more old fashioned and royal system ran by the dominate Venerable Communal Saiko Party, also called the Saiko Party or The Loyal Party!***" The class became bored as she went on, the history being boring until they went to the part with the war. Not surprisingly, the school practically ran on the funds from the executive Saiko Party that now filled every branch of the national government, most schools in the Southern part of the green mountainous island were on the ropes of closing down, afraid about losing funds.

"***Our leader the avatar of Yuhuang Shangdi, The Jade Emperor: The Masked Emperor of the Saiko Party, Minister of Taiwan: Naruhi Chao. He took our office and took away the political idealogues and brought back many of the old customs of ancient Chinese culture; redefining what we stood for, redefining what we strive for, *redefining* why we fight, *redefining* why we die… why we work to ensure the success and great prosperity of him and the great nation we stand upon. Lifting our shoulders through pray and wisdom to him, who shall give us what we ask in return. He made the corrupt old outdated capitalistic and socialistic main governance run with their tails behind their backs, making the Taipei War 70 years ago short and efficient; to make it so little casualties happened.***

So he and our most greatest of representatives are benevolent and filled with giving, and have lead us to greatness and freedom from both the flaws of the past and of the vile futurists. The ones who stand against divine* AUTHORITY*, shall face properly swift and professional justice."

The teacher paced back and forth through the front of the room, walking side to side, then as she continued… she pulled a few strains of her black hair back, a pretend professional appearance, as she started walking around the whole room and looking at the kids with a stern and cold expression. The kids in her eyes looked grey and clayish.

"Today, we stand as the only hybrid nation that values our past, and of the future. That's why we strive for the greatest, and we will out compete with everyone. And keep our past at heart, pure in traditional and spirit, unlike the westerns. Which shall be led by our glorious prophet…

Who no matter what you see on the news, no matter the yelling of mad young teens seeking unearned control without knowing how to lead and old fools stuck in their backward ways. They are false, you know the people here will help you succeed. The people that shall get you good jobs, make sure you are headed the right direction. Not those drunkards and drug addicts on the streets trying to lead you astray."

The class soon ended, the time before being 9:30 and the time now is 11:00. The trio left and went to their writing class, where like every school on the green island, they learned how to write with black ink and pencil in old and new chinese mandarin, which they probably will forget afterward since most adults only need to speak in mandarin do not write in it, instead preferring english. After that they had a sort lunch period where Xiao-lan ate some tofo and cabbage soup with noodles, Walt ate the same (needing a light diet), and Timmy eating something from home, whip cream with peanut m&ms over a thick flowing chocolate brownie, with a Italian cheese hot pocket (Which both Xiao-lan and Walt had no idea where he got that from). After 12:30, they go to their lockers to get their stuff for their math class, entering the white lifeless halls of the more indoor part of the school, the weird dirty or chemical smell all around every middle school in the world, a meaningless effort just to get a diploma in your hand you can go to college and have more teachers talk your ear off. Xiao-lan wished he was older, older to go to those fancy clean and carpeted universities and meet intellectuals who wouldn't look at him and leer, look at him and judge, but understand him and he understands them.

That thought quickly fades as the clearest black stain of the school pops out of the blue, slamming his hand next to Xiao-lin's long ears revealing themselves from his black hoodie from the shock of a loud slamming sound, turning in surprise to see a familiar face. It was the a tall boy, seeming someone who should be in high school, wearing a black zipper jacket with a azure dragon and Yaoguai across it, and on his back a white tiger and red phoenix surrounding each other; also wearing torn black jeans and biker gloves, with jet black and red japanese motorcycle gang boots with spinning metal spike spurs and flat iron knuckles to beat up any uncooperatives. Xiao-lan knew exactly who this was: Su-wei Zhu, and his friends behind him, a skinny one with a mohawk, a goofy fat dude and short guy; this was The Zhu Dogs, a motorcycle gang who just happened to go to Xiao-lan's school, and also pick on him and Timmy specifically. "***Yo! This is the third time you didn't give my friend The Hawk, and Tweedle dee and***

Tweedle dum our lunch money. And the fifth time you forgot to give a copy of your math homework to us."

Zhu getting in Xiao-lan's face, who looks down and keeps his eye contact away from Zhu.
"***I don't have a copy Zhu, I don't have any lunch money either. Me and my friend are going on fasting.***"

"The Hawk" looks at Xiao-lan and moves forward a bit, almost pouncing before keeping his feet on the ground, his legs and shoulders constantly moving. "***Fasting?! You little lying brats!***"

"***Stop-agh-op(*violent cough*)***"

Timmy looking to his brother in great worry, but Zhu ignores the wheelchair kid and tries to calm down his right-hand goon. "***Hey Hawk! Chill dude... chill... you got it? I got the perfect way for you guys to repay us. You can be our punch dummies tonight, so we can practice our kung-fu on you guys.***"

Xiao-lan looks to his struggling friend and to that friend's older brother trying to help him, searching his pockets and then his backpack for a medicine bottle, and looking back to the cause of all of this. Xiao-lan, wanting to be as strong as his father, adopts his frame and stands against Zhu. He spits at his face, his declaration of war.

"***Get lost, Zhu.***" Zhu snarky ghostly white grin and weasel-like charm immediately disappears as he goes into a blind rage, throwing Xiao-lan in a locker, grabbing Xiao-lan's jacket collar. "***I don't think you heard me correctly, mutated rodent kid. That's the least we can do to you guys. I can kick your ass right now in front of everyone, or you can just get a nosebleed as a training dummy at my teacher's dojo. Your choice, genetic mistake dipshit.***" Zhu lets him go and backs away, forming a cruel smile, then walking to class, intentionally bumping his arm against Xiao-lan as he goes, his goons and The Hawk laugh. The Hawk seeing a opportunity, he gives Timmy a nasty wedgie before leaving himself. Timmy wants to scream at them, but his fear overtakes him, and he just mumbles angrily to himself. "***Why do you let those guys bully you two like that?***" Walt protests, Xiao-lan responding angrily while shoving his long ears back into his hoodie:

"***What do you want me to do? You want us to get into more trouble with that biker gang?***"

"Bun-man, can you please be mindful of Walt's health." Timmy states, while pushing Walt along behind Xiao-lan.

"Oh sorry… wait… oh you… arghhh…" Xiao-lan holding back his tongue, grinding his teeth as he wanted to curse in that moment, but knowing that's bad manners, let's that feeling pass.

"***They're going to beat you up, anyway, why not let everyone see it so they can get reported?***" Walt rubbing his itchy upper arm.

"***It's not going to fix anything; they already know where I live. Zhu would turn me into his lifetime punching bag if I ever got him and his gang expelled. But he doesn't know where you live, Timmy. You are lucky compared to me when it comes to that.***"

"***Everyone knows where you live, Xiao-lan...***" Timmy states plainly.

"(*sighs*)... yeah...those fricking losers…" Walt looking at the clock above a class doorway, then yells to the others. ***"Let's not worry about it guys, we still need to get to Algebra class, it's 12:42!***" Xiao-lan looks confused and pulls out his phone to see the time. The time was worse than they thought. "***Oh damn! I forgot about that! We got no time, let's go!***" The group rushes clumsily to the most hated of math classes, with Walt rolls his wheels faster and faster, to get their calculators and algebra textbooks, bumping into each other in the lockers and almost tripping over each other as they sprint towards clas-

"**NO RUNNING IN THE HALLS!!**"

The boys turn to hear a loudspeaker behind them, the sound coming from a beer-belly hall monitor with that damn loudspeaker in his hand coming out of the interconnecting hall. The tiro bow their heads quietly to apologize and go from running to walking fast enough where they can get to class and slow enough so the hall monitor won't yell into his loudspeaker and to avoid embarrassing themselves further. Once math class and their science and English class were done, the three left the school and hang out to talk on the steps of the white stone entrance of the school, talking near a little green area with trees, with a metal colorful red flamingo prop. Timmy picked his nose as he started the conversation, Walt trying to look away from Tim's face when he did that. "***So you coming to the beach with us, Xiao-lan?***"

"***You guys live at the beach, it's kind of hard to avoid.***"

Xiao-lan's smarm, which usually only comes out when he's alone with his friends starts coming out, his truer self. "***Maybe I should come… you know, to see that beautiful beach… to see your mom, see her beautiful face and...***"

"***Stop it man! That's disgusting!***" Xiao-lan throwing his arms in the air in response, gesturing like he's about to be put on police cuffs.

"***I'm kidding, I'm kidding man! I'm just throwing the shade you throw at me!"***

"Whatever." Tim waves his hand dismisses away toward Xiao.

Walt chimes in. ***"Well we got that new Forest Knight game"***

"The one with the giant cool sword and the demonic dragon, you want to come fight that boss? I just got level 10 last night." Timmy interjecting in, gesturing wildly like he was trying to imitate presentation speaker.

"***Ugh... yeah, yeah sure. I'll come.***"

"***Yes-…!***" Timmy throwing his fist up and jumping in the air like he was in a platformer, which startled the other two a bit.

"***BUT only for a few hours, then I got to do homework.***" Walt comes in and says: "***Well you can stay and do homework at our place, you know, after or maybe before… the game?***"

"***Yeah, but I'll have to call my Dad. That does sound fun, you thinking about like a sleepover?***"

"***May-be?...***" Walt says unsure, looking to Timmy to finish, and of course, Timmy says: "***Oh man! I gotta show you that new song that came out by Girls' Generation... MISTER... TAXI...***"

"***OOook. Um, I'll call my Dad and tell him, hold on.***"

Xiao-lan picks up his smartphone and tells Adam about him having a sleepover with Timmy and Walt, and Adam is fine with it. "***My dad says he's fine with me going.***"

"*Woohoo! Slumberpartttty!*"

The trio leaves the school ground and go a little aways, passing a small alley between two houses to get back to the Nanwan main street. Then going toward the direct south, toward the southern beach, far past the walls surrounding Hengchun. They walk for a while, Timmy about to grab Walt's wheelchair, but Walt slapping his hand, trying to wheel himself around. Timmy gets in front where Xiao-lan is and walks besides, his flabby arms moving side to side, while Xiao-lan's bunny ears move side to side and his black hair is messed up a little by the wind. A pretty calm, quiet walk-in general compared to the chaos in the school. Then Walt eyes brighten as he a thought pops up in his brain. "***Wait, what about the Zhu Gang?***" Xiao-lan turning behind, his big eyes looking down in thought and then looking forward and continuing the walk, he answers: "***He doesn't know where you guys live, plus if he enters my dad's house, they won't be kicked through a wall. Plus, we well get beat up either way, it's better if we aren't in their territory when it happens."***

"***That's pretty optimistic.***" Walt state matter-of-factly, looking to Timmy and then away to avoid Timmy's stupid and invasive stare.

"***How's that optimistic?***" Timmy once again interjecting…

"Well, because the world isn't that simple. There's a lot of variables to consider-"

"Such as?"

"Well, such as… if we-"

Xiao-lan whose attention was drawn into the nature. Birds chirping and flying, in a triangle formation above him. Together, companionship… home. He looked to the busy town life around him, watching people walking by a couple holding hands... two elderly folk eating strawberry ice cream together. And ones who are walking alone, who had seemed professional and walking to who knows where… but Xiao-lan's sees their faces and all he sees is a depressing future, one filled with nothing but death scrolling and working… a future that may be his. Though, it was hard to focus with the constant noise of the two irritating him.

"***Let's just focus on walking, ok guys?***" They walk up some hills, passing into the forested tropical southern bottom coast of Taiwan, following an old ancient path that Timmy and Walt had been using for years to get home, Timmy having to forcibly push Walt's wheelchair through some ditches and high hills. Getting to a clearing by the coast, the moving soft waves of the sea, gently moving the send underneath onto the sand and the purple orange tinted sky in the clear, a sleepy bright orange sun lowering itself into the line between the sky and vast blue. Xiao-lan couldn't help but stop to look at it, Walt even though crossing this path everyday always glares at it with hope in his eyes, Timmy reminding the two to stay focused and making a joke about not wanting to be out here until night. Walking down the final hill, they make it to southern beach in Pingting county, South Taiwan, a little while from the southern edge of Hengchun, that Xiao-lan lives and the middle school is. Xiao-lan had his thin headset on him, and he was listening to some music while the Toths' went forward in front of him. He put in a green cassette tape in, Timmy looking behind with a "oh really?" look on his face, a kid using tech over a half a century older than him is beyond Tim's understanding.

"Roads go ever and ever on… over rock and under tree… by the caves never sun has shown… by streams that never find the sea."

It's cool weather, and a salty smell... the sand feeling like one of those old sandboxes at recess you would play on. And snug in the corner was the Tóth home, which was built into the bottom of a large ancient tree, a two-story chalky white painted beach house, worn from years of exposure to the salty sea air, with thin white wood pillars holding the second floor up, one of them having a black metal plaque with golden mandarin lettering "Toth Family, Toth-Carol".

Climbing up the winding stairway to the little nice balcony, with a wooden rocking chair with a Mongolian pattern quilt over its top and a firepit they enter. Going through a little hall, their feet touching the soft dusty grey carpet, with the walls filled with family pictures as they enter the barely lit tv living room. The TV tea table covered with littered crushed cans of Tsingtao Lager Beer, and two bottles of Kaoliang liquor mixed with milky brown vanilla boba tea to ease its strength. The red couch with stains of juice and obvious shacking activity across its putrid though comfy surface, there's was already a man sitting on it, a half bald asian man with a thick black rectangle-like mustache and no beard, drinking his last bottle of Kaoliang. He drank half the bottle, almost falling to his side on the couch before noticing the Toth brothers and mutant bunny kid in the background. "***Oh there you boys (*burp*)... are. Your mom is in the other room. Carol! The boys are here!***"

??? "***Oh! Welcome home!***"

Carol leaves the kitchen, a black-haired lady thin with a long face, and seemingly overworked. Wearing a dark pale brown pants and business over shirt unbuttoned due to the heat revealing her white under shirt with the picture of "Celebration Taiwan New Year", which was from 3 months ago, and had her dirty blonde hair tied into two ponytails both going down her shoulders.
"***Oh Timmy? Do you mind taking out the laundry once it's done?***"

"***Yeeaah...***" Timmy says with a drone, him then going to the room on the right, where the lightless dark tiled room with laundry and cleaning supplies is. "***Do you guys feeling Pizza, from that... Manglia's place? Or maybe the usual noddle place up the street?***"

"***Mom, those pizzas are not even that good. Why not get beef dumplings?***" Walt responds, shifting around in his wheelchair.

"***Listen to your mom (*burp*), Walt...***" Brian speaks up in his drunken stupor, while using the controller to switch the show from opera to the Kaohisung Baseball channel.

"Ughh Brian…"

"***Mom, can we just eat the snacks at Home? Or just go to McDonalds?***" Tim yelling from the other room.

"***Ugh... that's so bad for you, Timmy. Why not some Ya Su Ji chicken or… you know, the much healthier the green onion pancakes from Miss Jing's restaurant? They're your favorite!"*** Their mom listing things out that she herself rather be eating, reminiscing old good times.

"We ALWAYS ate there." Walt putting his hand on his forehead and dragging it across his face, making his face droop for a little bit with his mouth ajar showing his dull teeth. Timmy poking his head from the laundry room like a chicken yells out.

"I want nuggies!" Then going back to doing his laundry.

Xiao-lan mumbles: ***"I rather just have tofo and veggies honestly."***

"(*sighs*) sure. Brian Wang!" The mom shouting even though she's right by the couch, in hopes of waking up her husband.

"Don-don't say my full name like that… augghhh…" Brian tried to finish his statement, but his eyes started to close as he slowly drifted off to sleep. The mother surprisingly not responding, even though putting two of her fingers on the inbetween of her eyebrows, two others on her nose's sides… like she trying to stop get plug her nose. She had to deal with his nonsense for a hot minute and no longer feels frustration about that; more so the frustration is being caused by her overly picky kids.

"Can you at least get the laundry out when it's done. And wash the dishes?"

Brian slightly awake answers in a mumble: "***Sure... after the gam-game is done…"***

The drunken giggling man's attention turned back to the TV as his mind was high and body completely wrecked. Seeing one of his favorite athletics hit the ball to a homerun.

"Haha… funny SCORE!"

Brian makes a side eye to her, but gets distracted when his favorite baseball taiwanese player: Chien-Ming Wang, get the ball by jumping high in the air, the ball almost looking like it be a homerun. The mother sighing, but knowing she isn't going to strain her relationship with her sons even more...

"(*sigh*) sure. Let's go boys."

Walt/Xiao-lan/Timmy: "***Happy meals! With multiple toys.***"

"***No!... only one for each of you.***"

"***If I get a crappy toy, can I steal from Walt or Xiao-lan?***"

Xiao-lan looks with to Timmy in a confident smile, his ears pointing to the side, as his eyes and face make a mocking grin. "***You are not getting my toy, only kids who study hard get toys.***" Timmy slaps Xiao-lan's shoulder and exclaims:

"***That's not true! Happy meals are a luck game, right mom!?***"

"***Just get in the car you two.***" Carol helps get Walt inside the car, Walt buckling himself in the middle seat, Carol rolling the wheelchair back into the house. While the Toths' mother was distracted, the rabbit boy and the chubby clown seating in the back, start continuing their fight... quietly... ***"(*whisper*) I will get a good toy this year.***"

"***They are just McDonalds toys man, you just get PC game on steam or a mobile game on your phone."***

"***It's not about the toys being practical, it's a matter of pride.***"

"***Whatever you say man, just don't be surprised if you skipping on homework affects what you get.***" Timmy bumps Xiao-lan aggressively, but then chooses the fold his arms, and look at what Walt is doing, simply looking at the old buildings passing the window, wondering what life the workers there live compared to his own. Meanwhile, Timmy isn't thinking that at all, just wondering if Walt was daydreaming or not.

Though Xiao-lan couldn't help but notice at the edge of his vision, a tall black clothed man with some sunglasses staring from in the forest line, but when Xiao-lan went to take a closer look, the man disappeared entirely.

"What's your malfunction, Xiao-lan? Come on…"

"Alright… hmm… alright." Xiao-lan looking behind him, wondering if what he saw was real or not… if it even meant anything at all.

The boys and the mom get into their car and head out to get McDonalds. and come back a little bit later, rushing upstairs the boys' single bedroom, with happy meal boxes with shitting eating grins and eyes straight from the underworld. Opening the door and hoping on to Timmy's transformers bed, Walt just wheeling awkwardly though efficiently using the back frame of the bed to get himself off the chair, while Xiao-lan taking off his jacket and throwing it into a corner in the room, his rabbit ears popping back up, Xiao-lan rubbing them with slight pain. Once everyone got their school uniforms off, and Xiao-lan's t-shirt being wrinkly due to him never properly drying his clothes right, while the other two have a mom do it for them, are completely wrinkle free. With all of them settled, they begin taking out unhealthy mcburgers and nuggets straight from the shores of America and stuffing it in their mouths, with Timmy with lemony sprite, Xiao-lan with a cherry variant, and Walt simply drinking from a chocolate boba tea. "***Don't you think... this looks a bit... off?... to you?***"

"***Hey... as long as I get my toy, I have no complaints... Fu-Damn! Another weird smiling plastic Ronald Mcdonald again?! Why do I always get these instead of the transformers? You guys get cool toys all the time!***"

Walt takes the toy away and looks at it, and then says: "***No, remember when I kept getting the Ansok*** *("and-soak")* ***bobble head airplane thing?***"

"***What are you talking about, star war characters are cool! I would even get the damn fat mafia boss then a freaking clown.***"

"***His name is Mammo*** *("ma'am-mo")****, everybody knows that.***"

"***You know that anything with Ron Mcdonal is possessed, even the commercials? Like The Ring, man. I saw one of these toys moving on it's on and getting under my blanket.***" Xiao-lan wanting to engage, but hearing Timmy's nonsense over and over just makes him want to shut Tim up more. "***That's probably your mom, Tim.***"

"***It WASN'T! IT WAS MOVING ON ITS OWN! IT WAS POSSESSED! IT TOTTTALLLY WAS MAN! IT'S, YES! IT'S LIKE THAT DAMN CREEPY ANABELLE DOLL!***" Timmy jumping up on the bed, the bed almost collapsing off due to excessive emoting and jumping of Timmy, trying to talk with words and gestures at the same time, which just ended up weirding out the Xiao-lan and Walt. Xiao-lan comes in with: "***I told you shouldn't watched that movie dude. Just pray to your ancestors to get you a better toy.***"

"***Prey to my... what are you talking about? My ancestors don't even know what a PlayWagon 3 or Mr. Ronald is, bun-man!***"

"***I told you *NOT* to call me that!***" The boys argued some more time before Walt got tired and turn the old dusty cable tv on, playing a that video cam footage that shows a bunch of people tripping by the pool and anywhere in the backyard with a fake laugh track "*Here's another goof!*"… before one of their favorite shows was on CarToonGoof (CTG) Channel. "Marshal Grain", A 80s inspired cartoon show about a humanoid grain, who is a secret agent from the Corn District, who fights against the evil white bread head: Doc Gluten, who plans to make everyone allergic to Gluten, so he can make everyone have a allergic reaction. This is Timmy and Xiao lan's favorite show. The animated intro with a bunch of action would play every time and has a SpongeBob narrator voice over it: "*Here he is, it's Marshal Grain! The greatest defender of Corn District! El mayor defensor del distrito del maíz!*". And cool metal song would play with this lyrics: "*He is the best see-cret age-gent of allll timmmeee! Oh yeaah! The best secret agent of alll timmmmee! He just can't beeee stopppped! Baby! He's so cool that he is fffing hiiggghhh!*"

"***That character is so crazy, but he hates gluten and I like that.***" Walt still savoring his chicken tendies "***Because you hate gluten, because you are allergic.***" Timmy chuckles and pats Walt's shoulder while stealing his chicken nuggets "**(*eating while talking*) *Haha... cheese also, so many good things you missing out on.***"

Walts watches like he is reading a car manual "***Says the guy who can't eat chocolate.***"

"***Chocolate is gross, and everyone knows that vanilla is the best and most common close, and strawberry is second.***"

Xiao-lan retorts: "***You know Timmy... I read that chocolate has a chemical in it that makes a girl instantaneous fall in love with you.***"

Timmy looking to Xiao-lan in a brushed way, making Walt break out in laughter, Timmy realizing and shook it off, trying to compose himself. "***Why would I need that?***"

"***You know... (*chuckles*)... you can always give a bar of chocolate to a member of Girl's Generation one.***"

"***You think i'm THAT dumb? Girls are more complicated... gracious... beautiful and elegant creatures to be tricked. And those goddesses can never be overcome by that, I must train my charisma points and... sex appeal... to win those angels over.***" Timmy talking about is greatest passion, like he was in a character in a romance novel.

Walt responds: "***Charisma is a born talent.***"

"***No it isn't, I saw a nerdy Tubeneter marry a hot wife.***"

"***She's probably has low standards.***" Xiao-lan being smug. Both Xiao-lan and Walt have the same thought as they whisper ("*Yeahh... he be right.*").

"***You guys just need to get out and talk to girls more, you know I have at least talked to nine girls at our school, and you only talked to one, Xiao-lan, and got *totally* rejected. You never even talked to one again. And Walt, you can't just keep talking to Lilly Shen all the time, she is a geek.***" Even though Timmy is considered the "uncultured" one of the group, there is no mistaking he a true conversationist when it comes to women, and the true victor in the game of life (Well at least in Xiao-lan's and Walt's eyes).

"***That's why we can relate to each other.***"

"***Can we just go back to watching the show, Timothy?*** " Walt getting tired of the discussion, rubbing one of his science textbooks, making it clear what he rather be doing.

Suddenly an cartoon ad campaign showing the Novus Ordo flag and name shows, looking to hire any eastern Asian foreigners into the international army... with the picture of a shirtless with a leather belt and long pale brown jeans. He is a HUGE shouldered man with a short white chin beard hugging around his face named; standing much higher than the small male and female reporters gathered around him on a red, blue, and green starry background. There is a golden colored quote under the giant man with his fist pressed against his chest turning his head to look to something saying:

"*We help the world by putting a shield around it. To make the crazy beasts to come out of the blue, the other smaller coalitions and normal nations can't finance defending themselves every day. We can…if you want opportunity, Join the army, join the Europe wide federation… and serve and help your nation effectively… to protect the people of the world from the villains and the warmongers that hinder peace."*

- The President of The Novus Ordo Coalition of Europe."

"Hey! Isn't that the guy that blown up a bunch of tanks with his bare fists?" Timmy spontaneously yelling like he just remembered a second ago and spat it out, getting up and pointing at the tv screen.

Xiao-lan's taking off his hood to hear what Tim just said more clearly… his ears he normally is very careful about moving, opening up and rising in the air; turning toward Tim… interest peaked, and Tim noticing with a wicked grin. ***"You mean from the found footage? That could have been faked."***

"I thought you said you *liked* the *footage*!"

"Well, I do. It's just hard to believe is all… you know, having *nukes* for fists."

"That stuff is real, it absolutely happened."

"Oh really?" Xiao-lan asking curious, ears and eyes going toward Walt to his other side… still sitting on his wheelchair (like always), Tim peaking his head over and nearly laughing at the rare sight of a problem he likes to hide. ***"How do you know that?"***

"I read it on a Reddo forum."

"Ohhhh…" Timmy winding up. ***"So taking things from Reddo is completely reasonable, but putting two chocolate brownies together with vanilla ice cream is a "abomination"? "***

"How the heck do you even manage to get brownies i

Walt rolling to Tim, looking at his brother dead in the eyes. "Brother, don't say that word around Xiao-lan."

"It's… it's ok, Walt."

"You don't have to hide your feelings around us, Xiao-lin-"

"NO… no it's fine. It's about the intent…"

"Xiao-lan…"

"And how the heck do you even manage to get brownies here, Tim?..."

Xiao-lan changing the topic, Walt just looking to the ground in, sighing in a quiet breath.

"…All the shops on nearly this whole island are noodle soup, broth, chicken, beef, and some rice and vegetables."

"If you look for people with similar interests, you can find what you looking for."

Xiao-lan responding with only a loud "*hmph"* sound, in almost a agreeable sort of way. Later that night, Timmy challenged Xiao-lan to try to finish one of the final bosses of Forrest Knight, being a mad purple clown with angel wings trying to destroy the world. But the boys were jamming to "*Dancing Mad*" too much to beat it and gave up in after 30 minutes.

After a while the boys had their fun of tv and turned it off to started doing math homework. After a couple hours of yawns and Timmy finishing up a few questions not part of the teacher's lesson, they yawn for a final time and sleep together in bed, in the comfy Toth home on the moonlit calm beach.

When the brothers start sleeping, a Xiao-lan smiles, leaning over the body and lifting up slightly over the chilled-out Timmy, snoring like a elephant, and Walt somehow snoring louder with worrying gasps in between. Xiao-lan picked up the mini handy bag he brought with him, unzipping the bag as quietly as possible and looking around. Taking out his headphones and a physical tape, worn from overuse…

putting it into a tape player and putting his headphones… the tape called "*The Glass Princess – A Dream Comes From The Heart.*". Then bouncing to his side and looking through the window with tired flickering eyes, then pressing play.

The night eventually goes away, the moon sitting to sleep and the sun rising to wake all the lazybums, the sounds of waves crashing muffled by the layer of wall separating the kids from the outside air. Xiao-lan woke first, taking off his headphones quickly and putting away the tape. They all soon woke up and started getting ready, Timmy taking a shower while the Xiao-lan brushed their teeth, putting his hands over his right eye (promising not to look to the embarrassed Timmy). After they finished Timmy helped Walt take his shower, while Xiao-lan borrowed Timmy's clothes to wear and put the homework stuff and laptop in to his backpack. After Walt and Timmy put on new clothes in the bathroom, and Walt brushed, they came out and were ready to they to leave (the Toths didn't need backups since it was Saturday). Suddenly, Walt goes into a violent coughing and falling down to the ground while Timmy was holding on to him, trying to get him to the wheelchair. Timmy exclaims: "***Walt! Don't worry, we'll get the medicine, we can do your homework for you.***"
"***Just get the medicine (*coughs*), I-I-um… I need to-to (*nasty cough*)-to go with you, I want to finish my homework myself, man.***"

"***Ok, hold tight, Walt.***" Timmy rushes downstairs with his mom being heard asking what is going on, after being told Carol Toth immediately comes up with Timmy to help Walt get on his wheelchair and take the medicine. "***This is what happens when you boys yell at each other all night! You two need to control yourselves, now!***"

Xiao-lan/Timmy: "***Yes ma'am.***"

Xiao-lan asked if they could go to the library to study, as he doesn't want to get behind the exam and especially not Timmy to fail the exam. Walt was doing alright with the school work though, he was pretty smart, he only had some homework missing on the days he goes really sick, which sadly, was a common thing for Walt because of his condition (it seemed to lose a significant amount of hair everyday, left on the pillow).

The Toths agreed to go to the library, and Xiao-lan's dad said it was alright after Xiao-lan called him. Going outside to see the raising sun, Xiao-lan quickly puts his jacket not wanting the rest of the world to see him, but Timmy was silent, staying on the beach shore. Timmy looked with a somber expression at the big blue beyond, the loud salty bubble foams at the tops of the waves, the waves losing mass as it reached the tips of Timmy shoes, pushing some wet sand and a pinkie-sized crab on them, it scuttling away to find a seashell to hide in. Xiao-lan touched Timmy's shoulder and shook him a little to snap Timmy out of his funk, Xiao-lan giving a side eye, not fully knowing what was going on in Timmy's head, only guessing. ***"Timmy. You are you ok? Why are you out here and not with Walt?"***

"***It was... it was so long ago now. I thought I would get over it...***

I remember us showing up on the shore a little east from here." Timmy pointing to Xiao-lan's right side, by tropical forest line covering the sideview of the ocean. Xiao-lan sighing, but seeing Timmy suffering,

since he had time, Xiao-lan decided to sit down and listen to one of the few friends he had. "***Ok… you talking about how you came here, Tim?***"

"…Yeah…" Timmy voice and tone was in a monotone, completely unheard for the normally carefree and girl obsessed kid, but even he had his bad days… always running away from what happened. But he never forgot every time he looked to the edge of the sea.

"***My mom told me about my father... seven years ago. We came from the country called Albania, my father was a sort of unknown but an expert hardy fisherman-"***

"Yeah… Barnabes right?"

"Ye-yeah… (*sigh*)… him and my mother went on countless adventures across eastern Europe before they married. Shortly before I and Walt were born."

The winds from the sea started to pick up a bit, as the water rose higher and higher with every wave that hit the shore. The temperature getting colder and colder, Timmy looking on straight at the sea, and nowhere else, his attention unbreakable.

"He was born off from a wealthy family but set his sights on learning and going around the world rather than being in a forced marriage. He borrowed a lot of money, but it ran out after he married my mom. So, he had to work as a fisherman for a hot minute. He didn't have experience, but he told me

"Experience don't matter kid, only what you can tell and if you can back that up."...

I didn't remember much growing up in that country, only having an old NES console and a dusty Wii that my mom found in a rotted box in thrift store down the road from our shabby port home. We were going by nicely for awhile, it was only around when Walt was three, and when I was six that my Dad had the idea.

He wanted to take the biggest risk."

"Yeah, he tried to go across the pacific with you guys on a cruise. Your mom told us this story-"

"Xiao-lan! Please…"

"Whew… sorry."

"Yeah, she told it. My mom argued it was dangerous; she thinks it even more so now. You see how she freaked out when Walt was coughing."

Timmy pointing to the house, only glancing with a side-eye back to the little 2-story beach house, but still not fully breaking eye contact with the ocean.

"Yup. I thought she was going to throw me out the window and gave you a spanking or something." Timmy disagrees with this conclusion, gesturing that away.

"Nah… I get why you think that. But she isn't like that… she just… lost. She doesn't trust people a lot now… she trusted Dad back then. Um, my father's ideas. I think she said the prices kept rising for the cruise, and that's why we couldn't go on the cruise ship instead.

Not being able to pay for that, my Dad decided of getting his own boat in Someelia, East Africa… and then sailing to India, and explore the vast countryside, delicious spicey food, and the unique customs (My mom said he got the idea from a rerun of National Geographic India on the tv). In the end, I think we got something like that, with Taiwan... We traveled on train, then hitchhiking to Madriden of Spain, Dad paying 971 euros to his older brother, my uncle Sir Driton, so he can pay his old pals in Someelia to get a boat ready under the name: "Barnabes and Carol Toth, Toth Family". The plane was to the seaside capital of Someelia: Mogadishu, where the locals gave us the family-sized sailing ship and said their goodbyes.

My Dad planned on sailing to island of Srei Lankio, which is right under India; but several storms kept putting them in the wrong course. We landed in Kedah, Malaysia, a few days later and got completely lost. I don't remember much of the rest, just that my Dad got along with the locals and worked as a fisherman in Selangor, only getting hired since some fisherman kept going missing or something. My dad tried to get in touch with his brother, but he couldn't reach him... we were pretty much stuck there for a year, until my dad got some funds to leave. (*chuckles a little*) That was fun, met some interesting friends there..."

"***Any more *interesting* after?...***"

"***They were more poorer. (sighs) The year went fast, and we left the country. My dad was confident in our course, all I remember is him saying:***

"*Those were freak storms in the main sea, we will just circle around the Philippines, and get to the bottom of Australia, and live with the brits.***"**

Timmy almost said with a mocking voice, feeling spiteful and angry.

"But, it didn't exactly turn out that way. My dad followed the coast of the Philippines, but sudden several storms kept coming at us, and pushing us further and further away from course. Then... *(*chokes on his words*)...* ***then...***" The clouds that were turning dark now have become completely black and the sea and wind started to roar. Xiao-lan moving away from the waters in fear he may be scoped up… but Tim didn't move. He was imagining the sea in front of him turning into a wild storm. Loud painful winds, and crushing cruel waves...

"***Hey Timmy, Timmy!... Listen... just relax... I know what happened. You got caught in the storm... you said... it was "****like a God hitting his fist against the sea and sky*". ***You don't have to continue if you want.***"

"***I want too, I didn't tell you the rest... my mom, me, and my brother made it to land, where you, your father, and the entire community were there to save us, and shelter us. But my Dad sacrificed his mortal life to save us....***"

Timmy sobs slightly, but not letting Xiao-lan see it, and quickly holding it in breaths in and out to calm himself, then continuing in a monotone. ***"We had a spare rift on the boat, my dad got me, my brother and mom on. But the rift was still connected to the boat, so he had to untie the rift, and a big wave came over... and... he was gone. Eventually the waves took us as well, but we were hanging on to the boat and managed to get to shore. If... if I was brave… (*struggles in breath*)"*** Timmy struggled with his last sentience, he thought it in his mind clearly, but his body struggled to let those words be in reality. His face red and bushed, his throat tightens, eyes wet, he cranked out those hard words, the weight of guilt, out of his soul. He looked Xiao-lan straight in the eyes… with a sorrow he almost never displayed: ***" I could've helped him, I might of made it faster and he could of been saved.***"

Xiao-lan came up closer, pausing as he struggled to up with the right words. And even after he says it, he still felt like it wasn't good enough "***The past is the past, you said it yourself. Don't get caught up in the past? Like the song you listen to recently- Ziggly Alberts, don't get caught up with the negatives of the world.***"

"***That's is a really good song. But that's different from what happened to my father, I still could of...***"

Walt finally coming back out of the house in his wheelchair, going down the little ramp to the soft sand, it seems like he was ok.

"***Hey guys! I don't want to pressure you all or anything, but we only got so many hours to study. Can you guys talk about this another day?***"

Xiao-lan turns back to Timmy, putting as hand on his shoulder much like his adoptive father. "***Yeah… you ready Timmy?***"

Timmy shallows a deep gulp, and breaths in the salty air, then nods as he puts out his hand as Xiao-lan grabs it and pulls his flabby body off the sand and to his feet. Walt staring on, moves his upward to gesture for them to get going. While they go to the tropical forested passage that leads back to Hengchun, Timmy looks behind him, seeing the imaginary storm still overhead but still and silent, the waves becoming normal, though the threat of its destruction still lingering. While walking to the library, Timmy asks what Xiao-lan is planning to do after middle school. "***I'm likely to go to Hengchun Vocational High, which is too far on foot, so my father would to drive me there.***"

"***Why guys... do you think the Zhu Gang will try to find us?***"

"***Oh crap, I forgot about that.***"

"***No worries, man. They will probably forget about it until school, not really worth losing our minds about, bun…"***

"What?... what were you going to say, huh?" Xiao-lan being cheeky with his arms crossed, bumping shoulders with Tim, still looking behind him to anyone looking. In the end, Xiao-lan will always be awkward.

"Nothing… sorry, Xiao."

"***So you are fine getting a wedgie again?***" Timmy retorts matter-of-factly rubbing his neck, speaking sort of in a monotone.

"***Uhh... of course not. But… we have no choice so….***" The hooded rabbit trails off and shrugs with his hands in his pockets, ***"Yeah…"*** Timmy barely surprised either… the two now numb to Zhu and his goons humiliating them. Xiao-lan looked to Walt, and asked what he thought, wanting Walt to join in, since he didn't talk much. "***How about you, Walt? You always have things figured out.***"

Walt seemed to be put off by this, mostly zooming out of the conversation between his brother and friend but felt comfortable enough to ask the question. "***Um, yeah… I want to be a musician, or writer, or movie director, video game creative director… or maybe animator. I'm trying different genres and different things. I mostly don't know which, I just keep mostly thinking about what I'll do, rather than figuring out.***"

"***Huh…?***" Xiao-lan just said blankly, though Walt continues. "***I'm still too young, so I have time to figure it out.***" Xiao-lan and Timmy both just say yeah to it, lots of yeahs… clearly one of them failed speech class and spread it like the plague to the rest of them (guess who it is in the comments). The group stay silent for a little bit, as the walked along the slim sidewalk, walking past some stands which Timmy eyes and nose were locked to them, his mind half there and half asking some questions about Xiao-lan's plans after high school (Walt just reading another hefty textbook, this time about marine life). Though suddenly they were interrupted by group of seemingly tourists from the Americas wearing hawaiian clothing came up with astonishment, looking at Xiao-lan, him starting to get a bothered and serious look in an attempt to scare them off, but the man of the group with a high-definition video camera around his neck getting in front of him. Seemingly the man was a blonde pale white and skinny, while the woman was definitely chinese and their daughter a mix of the two.

"***Ohh look darling! It's one of those Euclideans! I never seen one in person before, I never thought one would be in Taiwan of all places. It isn't a everyday thing, bro.***"

"***He looks brothered Zack, maybe we should leave him alone, he seems just to be a kid.***" The asian wife responded, who had long unrestrained black hair and no makeup, looking slightly older than her husband. "***A kid? No that would apply he's one of us. He's from an alien animal species from space, their kind slaughtered an entire population in our nation, he's not getting an ounce of sympathy from me. You can repay that debt though, mutant kid. Just take a photo with my daughter.***" The man suddenly changing his tone and looking up and twiddling his fingers excitedly. Xiao-lan is perplexed and mad,

though still trying to find something to say. "***Ohh that will look so good at my social media. #FoundEuclidean. First human family to met an Euclidean outside New Euclid in fifty years, you made us lucky… damn animal abomination humanoid… haha! My brother and my Tubeneter friends will love it****! So many likes...*." The middle-life tourist typing on his phone, the phone glare reflecting off of his goofy overly pointy, his hair going around the big bald spot on the center of his scalp not helping with his mid-life crisis face, wrinkles between his brows showing he is not a very happy person most of the time. Xiao-lan wanted to speak up, but Walt rolls in front of Xiao-lan and stands his ground. "***Leave my friend alone! He's doesn't want to be part of internet clout against his own sake. You kind of people making him feel bad about himself sickens me!***"

"***Heh... wait a second...***" The man suddenly searches deep in his pockets and pulls out 50 pieces of green paper, likely money. "***I'll pay you fifty for the photo, nothing more and nothing less.***"

"***What did I just say! Leave him alon-***"

"***It's ok Walt...***" Xiao-lan putting his small hand on Walt's shoulder, having thin furs that make him animal-like, though he still maintains a very human appearance other than the ears, nose, and ears. Then stepping forward, taking off his hood to reveal his long ears… a massive uncomfortable feeling go across Xiao-lan's whole body, but he persisted… he gave a slight grin toward Walt's direction, and turning his head back with obvious though misery now hardcoded into him even at 10 years old. "***Where do you want the shot?***"

The man after finishing texting, he says: "***To the wall...***"

"Lilly, go with the bunny boy."

The lady, now obvious Taiwanese, walked up to his daughter and pushed her on the back of the shoulder slightly to Xiao-lan's direction. In a very soft and angel-like voice the little american asian girl responses. "***Okk..***" Xiao-lan and the girl get together and Xiao-lan forces a closed eye grin with his index and pointer finger up while the rest of his hand was closed (doing a finger peace sign), and the other hand and arm was still to the side. After doing taking the shot, the man claps with joy and slaps Xiao-lan on the back as he gives him the 50. Xiao-lan taking the money quickly from the man, and the tourists leave… the man already causing trouble with the other people operating the dumping and chicken noodle soup stands nearby, giving out American money as well… his wife having to control him. Walt giving no shits, pulls a middle finger towards the man with the mother covering his daughter's eyes. Timmy come up to Xiao-lan, Xiao-lan pulling his hood back over his ears… the ears stinging always… Timmy noticing his eyes are more reflective then before. In concern, Timmy asks:

"You ok?"

"…I'm… (*sniffle*) I'm fine."

The three continue forward to the library now finally on Nanwan Rd near their middle school, Xiao-lan looks at the money and realizes they are american dollar bills and not taiwanese currency, though shrugs

and puts it in his pocket anyway. The trio still pretty silent, Timmy wanting to return to the discussion of Xiao-lan's future plans after high school, but Xiao-lan is distracting seeing a local dojo in Hengchun, the famous Shí rén Bào Dojo which is consider a landmark of the area. "***I think I will split from you guys for now, I'll meet you two at the library.***" Both the Toths say back: "***See you at the library!***" Timmy walking far enough away, whispers in Walt's ear. "***What do you think bun-man is so interested in?***"

"***Stop calling him that. Did you not see what happened? Be kinder next time he shows up, ok?***" Timmy looking awhile, putting his hands in his short pockets, Tim scratching his head and some dandruff falling off, and biting his bottom lip. ***"Right. Sorry."***

Xiao-lan crossing the street with his hands in his jacket pockets, walking to the dojo snug between a saloon and a yoga class. The dojo sign saying:

Shí rén Bào Dojo

("She-yin baah/bow")

(Translated:

"The Bloody Tiger Dojo")

Xiao-lan looks through the window to see inside, seeing teens in white clothes practicing their punches. Xiao-lan sees the man training them in a black martial arts suit, with having black hair knot and an consent mad and disappointed look on his face. The kids in the class address him as "Sensei Kai", one of those kids being Su-Wei Zhu (Zhu's fullname), Kai teaching them about having no mercy to their enemies. Zhu is paying attention and looks to see Xiao-lan at the window, only grinning a little and then paying attention to his teacher. Seeing Zhu see him, Xiao-lan ran off kicking a wall and punching a fire rusted red hydrant… feeling the pain immediately after, his hand and foot swore the whole day after that. But a man near the large window saw Xiao-lan, and quickly rushed out the double doors.

"*Stop!*"

Xiao-lan turned around in surprise to see an grayed old man with no facial hair and a thinner sumo wrestler look, with shiny black sunglasses, and wearing the same outfit as Sensei Kai. "***Leave me alone. I was just seeing what this place was about. I don't want to join.***"
"***You are Adam's kid, yes?***" Xiao-lan turns around, sort of confused, then realizing that the man in front of him was the same man on the sign of the building, named: "Martial Sensei, Heise Khan". A famous Japanese and korean based-martial artist in the region that been teaching for decades and recently joining a program paid directly by the Saiko Party… where all the best students of the class can go on to get high ranking positions in the Taiwan military, perhaps now is he retired and this Kai guy is teaching in his place. "***Do not go, young one. I see potential within you... what is your name?***"

"***I'm Xiao-lan.***" Xiao-lan does a civil, forced smile, and shakes hands with Heise. Heise seeing the boy was agreeable, continue with what he was saying.
"***Adam was a great martial artist, probably one of the best in Hengchen or even all of Taiwan... You should join this dojo; we still have room for new members.***"

The old sensei reaching out his hand for a handshake, a warm wrinkly smile on his face. Xiao-lan looked at him with wonder, and then looked down, thinking about his adoptive father, and himself wanting to be able to fight off Zhu. However, Zhu was at that dojo, and the fear of having to deal with him was too much for Xiao-lan. "***I... I can't. I'm sorry."***

"Then… here's my card." Heise puts his hand into one of the pockets of his white and dark purple martial arts Gi and pulls out a business card with the dojo's name, address, and phone number on it. ***"I'm sure you would become a great Tiger."***

Xiao-lan stares at the card and looks to black haired thinned sumo man… Heise kept nodding like he was enticing Xiao-lan to take it. However, Xiao-lan's expression was unphased.

"No… thank you for the offer." Xiao-lan putting his feet together and arms to his side and bowing to the sensei… the sensei doing a half bow in attempt to stop him. But Xiao-lan was too fast, even when Heise yelled for him to come back; he was already down the block. Heise cursed his luck, because he knew out of all his students having the son of Choro's best student would have kicked all the competition and made the dojo unstoppable…What a loss.

Xiao-lan gets to the Laun Cheng Library on Xitan Rd and meets up with his friends. They go there to study math and history of Taiwan and china, and a bit of science. Timmy insists do some english study, but Xiao-lan laughs at him and ask if Timmy can't learn english on his own. Timmy eventually gave up asking and they focus mostly on their math and history homework, for some reason the actually English homework is barely hard, since after the Saiko Empire came to Taiwan, focus on history and math became more encouraged than learning the western languages.

Xiao-lan after his studies is walking back to his home, crossing slim Xitan Rd. Having to past a bad part of the town, expected for some homeless and some unknown motorcycle gang loitering there… instead… utter destruction. Houses are ruined and burnt once belonging to people too pour to pay their debts. Suddenly, he hears a commotion to his left. He turns to see an elderly couple having argument with tall muscular man who is wearing green military (seemingly with emblems of an general), with his sleeves cut, and an old clockwatch on his right wrist. His ears are unnaturally pointed, and his skin slightly pink... and his long dirty white hair, though it could be seen as a rockstar's haircut. The general's face has a long scar going from forehead, over one of his eyes, to the side of his neck. Early 30s and also having the feel of a hunter, wearing strange things like black leather and synthetic armor thick boots of military class, with rubber straps over them, and his worn green militant pants being snuffled into the tops, the right under his knees, his soles having iron chains. But Xiao-lan realized, it was the main land General of the Saikō Empire (which the people not in the school system or in the military refer to it as now): The Mighty and Glorious General Zasshu. A young prideful boy less than half the general's size leaves the small crowd wearing green chinese prince like clothes. The boy comes forward and goes into a martial arts

stance, with his one of arms extend with putting that arm's hand into a claw-like hand style like dragon, and the other hand with the same thing drawn back like a blade… his legs and black tai chi shoe covered feet mimicking his hands and arms positions. He prepares himself and locks his feet to the ground and then yells: "***Leave those people alone!***" The sly Zasshu looks over and laughs at the child who is telling him what to do. The boy tried to stop him from hurting the elderly couple to pay tax they can't offered. ***"Kid, I'm sorry, what's your name?***" The goblin-looking man was saying in a mocking way, leaning his head to the side, and leaning his back… putting right hand under his ear like he couldn't hear the princeling boy.

"***Suchiru...***" The boy still standing tall and courageous in-front of all the overshadowing adults.

"***Sue... Ha... what a strange name for a toughguy. Let me just-***" Zasshu thinking about for a second, then turning his head back to Suchiru. ***"Let me give you some good advice.***" The taller and older man walks up to the selfless boy, seeming like a giant compared to him, then kneeling down on one knee, getting straight in his face. A disgusted look on his naturally crazed face, Gen. Zasshu says in a threatening tone: "***Don't get into fights you can't win. I don't punch kids outside training."*** The soldiers (his men) behind him started laughing hysterically and Zasshu started to laugh too… then when they had their fun, Zasshu returned to talking to Suchiru. ***"So don't make me... overly dressed *brat****"
The tough-guy general sighing, gets up and walks to the couple, the elderly husband walking up to him and yelling:

"***You can't do this to us, we will pay the house! You just need to give us time!***"

Zasshu in a sudden swift movement grabbed the old man by his throat and lifted him up with one hand. The old lady screaming for help as the younger men around ran to help, but the soldiers lifted their guns up toward them... and the young men stepped back in fear. "***You had time, you know this house was made and paid for by the Saiko Party's hands. If you can't pay in two months, then you and your wife will just have to live the rest of your lives in prison.***"

"***ENOUGH! LET-THEM-GOoo!***"

The princely clothed boy suddenly rushes forward with his arms extended and his fingers curved as he jumps up, throwing a punch at Zasshu's leg. The attack landed, but the shock barely went through and the general didn't even budge or even paying any mind. Then, with a shift movement, the boy bit General Zasshu's hand hard, causing it to bleed a little. Which pissed Zasshu off greatly… he threw Suchiru off with insane strength that send him hurtling forward and crashing through and breaking through a 3-foot-wide wood pillar on the elderly couples pale blue front porch. Looking with hatred and a wild glee in his eyes, the high-ranking general (despite his insane appearance would tell you) approached the boy with a hand raised for a slap, the elderly man plead for the ruffian mad general to calm down... but nothing could stop the general's wrath now, Suchiru just broke his pride. In a firm position with his feet digging the ground, his right hand which was shaped to a slap now raises like he was holding an invisible snow globe. Then a sudden sound and crackling came from his hands, purple sparks starting to pop, and quickly became strange purplish pink electricity. The people around them were terrified and ran away from the

scene. The purple electricity sparked around Zasshu, and in a bright light, it became a ball of energy. A skinny and tall soldier from Zasshu's ranks, calls out in worry: "***Don't you think this is too much, sir!***"

"***He threw away my mercy, it's too late for him!***"

Xiao-lan was absolutely shocked ("is this a man a spirit that gained a mortal form?"), him stepping away from this crazy scene. Zasshu with a cruel smile one his face and his long tongue sticking out, he yells a war cry and chackle as he throws the electric purple ball of energy like a tennis ball towards Suchiru… the foreign Asian boy had barely no time to dodge and took the full force of the assault. It blow up as soon as it touched Suchiru's shirt like a grenade, blowing up in a electric and purple fiery explosion. When the large puffy cloud of gray smoke settled, half the two-story house was gone, and an ash covered body was left. The elders cried, while General Zasshu of the Saiko Party crackled a cold smile, dusted off his hands and walked up to the ash covered body to one knee. "***Next time kid, don't throw your life away by your need to prove yourself. Train and become a soldier. Use your durability of yours to aid the efforts of justice, of great men... then you'll become strong.***" He got up afterwards, and waved goodbye to the frighten and stunned while walking away with his men. The old man rushing and yelling to him: "***You can't do this, this is oppression! I will report this to your superiors!***"

Zasshu sighed and swinged his head around to the old man then walking at a fast pace and getting right into the old man's personal space. "***You people pay the party and the government for your homes and we pay the cops to keep your towns safe. If you don't pay up, you don't get the emperor's promised safety. Do you understand that? Now stop fucking around and find yourself a job, old man.***" Zasshu laughed cruelly seeing the fear in the old man's eyes, feeling powerless, and then with his men went to leave. The younger men rush to the old man to hold him back from trying to rush at experienced militant, who is leaving the scene he caused with his other troops, getting into a black government truck that drives away. Xiao-lan rushed into the ruins and tried to wake up the fancy ancient chinese princely costume boy. Thankfully, the boy managed to wake up and slowly opened his eyes. Xiao-lan dusted off the boy and tried to help him up, but he gave an angry look with his eyes and spat at him, before pulling has arm away and trying his best to run off. Though since he sustained a broken arm and leg, it made hard just to walk, as he made his way into random street corner, disappearing to who knows where. Xiao-lan with confusion and regret from what just happened walks back home with a heavy weight in each step. Walking back to his house and looks to see that old farmers' small house snug on the woodland line behind it, Xiao-lan sees through a window lit by a table candle, the farmer and his wife enjoying some noodle dishes together; the savory sweet smell makes Xiao-lan's mood better as he takes off his shoes and walks inside.

There's lunch on the the kitchen table, some hot savory ramen Adam made from scratch for when Xiao-lan came back. Xiao-lan puts his backpack up on the hanger near the front door and the stairway, and rushes to the backdoor to find his father. Passing through the back garden filled with bok choy and cucumber and sees that his father is resting on the backyard hill, seemingly looking at clouds. he calls out, and Adam raises his head a bit.

"***Hey Xiao-lan! Come over and look at clouds with me.***"

"***Oh, well... I got homework.***"

"***That can wait, come over here! Come!***" Xiao-lan raises his shoulders in begrudging agreement and rushes to the hill, and lays on the grass with Adam.

"***You see that cloud there?***"

"***Yeah...***"

"***What do you think that is?***"

"***Is it really important right now to look at clouds?***"

"***You act like you can't learn from cloud-watching, Xiao-lan. It's god's art piece... it's a test of imagination. Now tell me what that cloud to the right is.***"

"***Ugh... It's... it's a duck or swan.***"

"***Why do you think that?***"

"***It looks white... but the way the sun shines through the clouds, makes it look yellow. So sometimes it looks like a swan, other times it looks like a duck.***"

"***How does that make you feel?***"

"***"...umm... relaxed, I guess?***"

"***I see a cloud over there, it has a cute face, a strong personality, is swift... and has long ears.***" Xiao-lan turned to his side to face his father.

"***Dad.***"

"***Soo... how's your new year of school been? Meet any new friends?...***"

Suddenly the hills went silent, as only nature noises could be heard, Xiao-lan saying nothing as he just looked away from his Dad. "***What's with that attitude?... Wait...***" Adam Dart got up to his knees and spoke again. "***Is there trouble at school? Did someone bully you-***"
"***NO! No I'm* fine*. I'm tired is all.***"
"***No, no you are hiding something from me. What's going on?"*** Xiao-lan getting up and defending himself, not wanting to leave parts of his life to himself. "***I said i'm fine, ok! Leave me alone.***"
"***Son... I got to know if something bad is happening to you. You have to honest, otherwise we can't work together-***"
"***It's my issue! Why do you have to protect me from everyone, I'm old enough to deal with my own problems.***" Xiao-lan making wide arm gesturing, as he clumsily though with lots of passion made his points.

"***You're not, you're only-***"
"***You aren't even my real father! Stop telling me what to think!***" The air became stiff and heavy, Adam looking down trying to find words that he can't find, Xiao-lan with a storm of angry, quickly got up and marched back to the house and rushed upstairs to slam his door, ignoring his Dad's pleas to talk.

"***Son please... I'm sorry ok. I didn't mean to offend you. Just... just to know I love you, and really care about your safety. (*sighs*)... rest well, my son.***" Adam walks downstairs and opens a drawer and finds an dusty book. Adam opens it revealing old pictures of Adam and an younger Xiao-lan going Janfusun Fancyworld and riding that Dive Machine, which was utterly terrifying for him, but Xiao-lan loved it. Adam remembering how he drank too much that KO coffee before he went on and threw up after. A five-year-old Xiao-lan would jump up and down on the hotel bed, exciting to ride a coaster for the first time. There was another picture of them fishing at Adam's thinking spot: Longluan Lake, Xiao-lan and Adam being wet from falling in the water and Adam diving in water, strangely Adam caught a ridiculous big fish and won a contest with it a few weeks later. Remembering those old times with his son, he couldn't help but have warm smirk… but he thought and sighed… trouble covering his face. A pencil dropped beside him, and he turn to see a recent note in the open old desk drawer; something he forgot about but wished he never remembered it… he looked to the stairs… he knew what he should do.

A few hours later, Xiao-lan is in his room, covering his head under a blanket of darkness to get himself to fall asleep; the sky dimming outside not allowing him peace from his overactive mind. Two knocks to his door could be heard, and the door creaks open with the yellow light of the hallway. Adam Dart: "***Do you want to be alone?***"

"***No... (*yawn*) you can come in.***" Adam opens the door fully and walks into the room with a wooden serving tray covered with chinese good luck symbols and mandarin writing, the tray having two warm bowls of ramen noodles with chicken broth and bok choy, with two cups of a berry tea mixed with chamomile. Bring the tray the right bedside and taking out the tray's little supports and putting on over Xiao-lan's stomach. Xiao-lan uncurling himself and his mood slightly better through the encouraging smell of good ramen and tea, pulls himself slightly up and looks to his dad.

"Thank you." Saying shyly, walking and placing the tray by Xiao-lan's left side and gently sitting down by Xiao-lan's side with his hands against the edge of the bed. Adam looking down to the floor, and looking to his son.

"***I know you have trouble talking about stuff with me, so we'll play a special game between you and me right now. I will say nothing, and you can unload all your worries right now, no retort, no anything from my lips. They are sealed tight.***" Xiao-lan talks about his time at school and the pressures he feels, and that he doesn't want his foster father to get involved because Xiao-lan wants to solve his own problems. Which this gives Adam a idea... "***You know... if this is a bully problem, you can always do martial arts. I will pay for it and everything.***"

"***I already looked for one, that one near the library. It's my bully from my middle school was there!***"

"***You mean the... oh son... you were trying to get into that dojo near your school near the center of town? You could of just asked me, you can go to my old dojo.***"

"***Yeah! But I don't want learn that from an old loner's place, it want to learn how to PUNCH and KICK, like modern martial arts.***"

"***You may think that, but that's not what you really want. You want a solution to your problems, and I can assure you, fighting your bullying and trying to show your superiority will just make you go back to square one. Choro teaches more because martial arts is not only about fighting, its about balance. You won't get a coin out of that Dojo, they'll train you like a soldier and not a martial artist. Martial arts are more like being a monk.***"

"***Like those kung-fu monks on TV?***" Adam grinned and chuckled a bit at the remark.

"***Martial arts is more a religious search of the soul and determination rather than just physically getting stronger, Xiao-lan. But anyway, you'll get more if you just speak to Sifu Choro Gang.***"

"(*deep whine*) ok... where is he at?"

"***On the edge of the far eastern side of Hengchun, right on Hengbei Road in the hilly wood area. That's where his Dojo is: Yīngmíng Guàn Dojo ("yin-mean gah-wan"), that's it's actual name… but me and many others that went called it "The Crane Dojo". "***

"***Ok, I'll go there tomorrow.***"

"***Just make sure to not go into any suspicious-***"

"***I know.***"

"***(*chuckles*) Oh! I been waiting to tell you for awhile but do you want to hear Sermon on the Mount? or most call it The Beatitudes. It's one of Jesus's best sermons... and... well, you know."***
"I guess..." Xiao-lan hearing about religious lesson and feeling like it's another boring as hell history lesson at school.

Adam Dart moves in with his bible on hand, on the specific page of Matthew 5 3-12. Scouting the contents then sitting closer to Xiao-lan and showing him the page of the little black bible with white lettering. "***Ok, I got a little chapter from Matthew about it. I'm a little rusty with my reading with my "out loud" voice. Ahem... ahemm... hahahaa… eeehh***..." Adam sounding more awkward, and Xiao-lan getting more hesitant to listen. But Adam reclaimed himself looked to his judging son with an innocent laugh, then clearing his throat again

"***AHEM... here we go...***

"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. "

...that's all. The most important laws that Jesus wanted everyone to know, so they can find him and God, or the one above us all... watching and waiting. Seeing all our actions, and judging until a day the world needs you to act... even small and meager, or great and grand. You don't choose the time, but you can assure it may come to pass. And know how to stay strong even in dark times." Adam closing the back as the tension building up on his face passes away. Xiao-lan not understanding his guardian's view and feelings, asks:
"Why is it so intense? If that story came out these days. He would be seen as badass! With healing superpowers, and super agents and militaries gathering their forces to battle him. Like he's a super human! Like Fortis!" Adam stunned silent, though quickly gets back his tongue out from his thoughts. ***"Fortis is just some crazed loser who doesn't know how to live his life, completely consumed and shackled by his own fame-"***

Xiao-lan ignores and continues. ***"He would destroy anyone in his way that are on the wrong side of the law!"***

"Son, Moondrop-"

"Or maybe facing off with those comic book heroes, like Tarantula-Man or The Flightless Crusader? That would be real if someone with unlimited powers were!"

"God damn-LOOK!" Adam slams his fist against the little desk with the lamp lighting the room, the room desk and bed shaking suddenly before settling. Xiao-lan getting quiet as a mouse and pulling the bed sheet over his neck. Adam knowing he made a scene, calms down. ***"It's… umm… it's not like that. It's to help guide your actions. It's not like the righteousness of superheroes you like, like... umm... Vigorman or Captain Donal . It's more of not a physical change, but it can be… it's much MUCH more of a mental thing. And that's putting it lightly… it's a spiritual stepping stone."***

The father puts his hand on Xiao-lan's leg that was under the sheets, closest to the edge of the bed. ***"And I'm not saying you should or should not… but if you take those lessons of not the religion itself, but from Christ or some force that gives a solution for people to suffer less by their own choice. You will see approvements…. Trust me, I know."*** Adam pointing to his chest and saying it sort of sternly and emotionally, though taking breath and patting his son's leg. ***"It's not to suffer physically or emotionally that should define you. To seek good in others and do good, that is the way God... or whoever you see the creator, wanted us to be. To be unified and face out the world's challenges together... ahh..."***

Adam pausing for a second and patting Xiao-lan's leg. ***"This is probably too much for you right now. You want to get some shut eye, right?"***

"Yep"

"Welp…"

Adam slowly getting his old butt off of the bed and kissing his son on the forehead. ***"Good night, Moondrop.***"

"***Good night, Dad.***"

Adam turning off the dim lamp light on tall wood bedframe above Xiao-lan's head and leaves the room, closing the door softly.

"Make sure to keep your lunch pack secure and get all you need sorted-"

"I know… I do that everyday, dad."

"Ok… good night…"